

DIMWOOD™



RICHARD CORBEN





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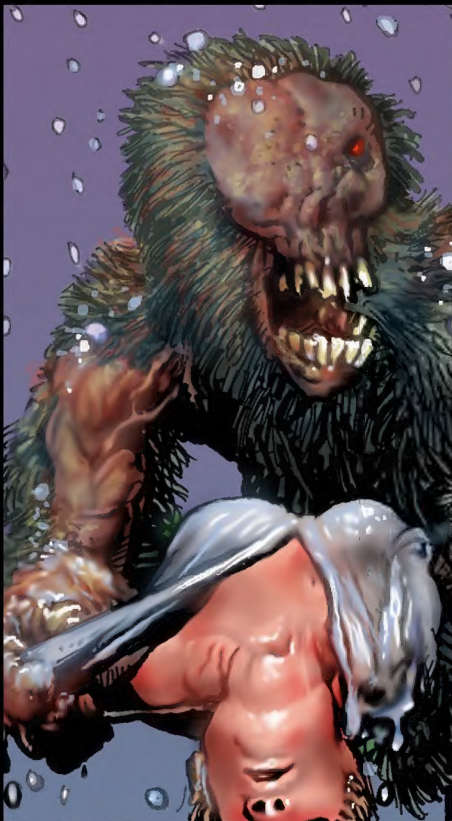
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For you, mr. c.
We did it!
My everlasting love.
mrs. c

For my Dad—
He was an amazing artist; he was also a warm,
funny, loving Dad. I am so grateful he was in my life.
This book is the last project he and I worked on together.
You never know when it's going to be the last time.



RICHARD CORBEN: A MIND ON FIRE

JOE R. LANSDALE



When I was a kid, only four or five, I discovered comics. We called them funny books back then. The moment I was introduced to them, fireworks went off in my head. I knew then I wanted to write and draw them.

I made my own comics that my mother dutifully stapled together for me. It was noted that my drawings, according to my mother, relatives, and people she knew, revealed me to be a gifted artist.

When I was older, my art was still pretty much the same level, and struggle hard as I might, it never improved. Turned out I wasn't gifted to begin with. I was more of a storyteller than an illustrator. But thanks, Mom. You meant well.

With unlimited practice, I might have reached the level of one of those gorillas that was

trained to paint, though that too was unlikely. The gorillas put their soul into their work. I just smeared paint around and my pencil drawings were always messy and the hands and feet of the characters I drew looked funny. They weren't hands that could pick up a rock, wipe their butt, or pleasure themselves. They had round fists and round feet. They appeared to have been drawn by a teddy bear mimicking its own constructs.

Because of this experience, my failings as an illustrator, what impressed me was just how amazing a truly gifted artist is.

I remember first seeing Corben's work in underground publications, and as soon as I did, I knew this was an artist on fire with a steady eye and a steady hand, but mostly with a unique understanding of style and story. He may have learned things from schooling, but

no amount of schooling alone can produce a Richard Corben.

He saw things differently. He looked around corners. He understood the rules of illustration, and therefore knew how to break them. He was also brave. He went there with his work. *Den* was the comic I liked best due to it being a ground breaker, not afraid of nudity or violence, and the protagonist wasn't exactly a Boy Scout. *Den's* world was a world where survival was all, and Den was damn sure a survivor.

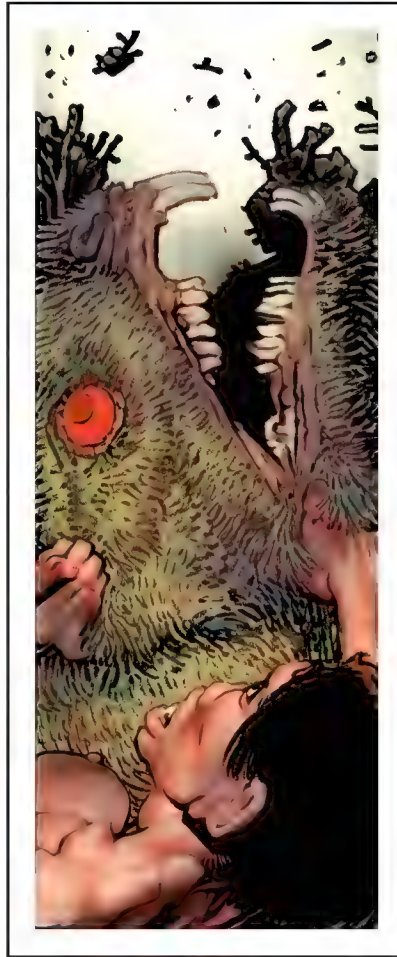
In the beginning, Den was a not-so-magnificent specimen. He was downright scrawny. Women didn't find him attractive or interesting. So, as anyone scrawny and rejected by women would, he builds a machine using directions left to him by his uncle. Once the device is finished, it cracks open the barriers between our world and another called *Neverwhere*. Through this crack, Den enters an apocalyptic landscape where he is transformed into a nude, muscular, bald, hero with an enormous penis, of course.

This storyline really appealed to me due to the fact it reminded me of Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Martian* novels, favorites of mine, and the main reason I became a writer. *Den's* adventures are like a magnificent fever dream. I was hooked.

My next remembered exposure to his work were Warren titles like *Creepy* and *Eerie*. His art style was distinct.

Corben was a knife in the ribs. A poke in the eye. His work was sensual and graphic. His

characters popped. He was never monotonous. You didn't confuse him for anyone else, though he certainly has imitators. You can't imitate what he does. It's too personal, too distinctive.



Even when Corben illustrated tales by other authors, like Edgar Allen Poe, work he did for Dark Horse comics, his magic shone through the stories in such a way as to make them a true collaboration, as if the authors were actually in the same room discussing ravens and corpses and black cats while Corben sketched out adaptation ideas.

When I was writing occasional comics for DC, I was fortunate enough to have Corben illustrate one of my stories, "The Split," and beautifully done it was. I don't really remember my story all that much. It wasn't bad, but Corben's art elevated it in such a way

as to make it seem far better than it actually was. His imagery I well remember. I hardly remember my story at all.

Awards? He's received more than a few.

Respect as an illustrator? Oh yeah, big time.


Influence? You bet.

But talk is not what finished art is about. It's about observing. It's not about me telling you how amazing it is. Corben's art is for the eye to see and for the excited heart to feel.

So turn away from this intro and dive into the belly of the beast.


And be amazed.

DIMWOOD



A **SINISTER RUMBLING** SHOOK THE **GROTESQUE**, PRIMEVAL FOREST. THE TANGLED GROWTHS **CLUTCHED** EACH OTHER, **SHUDDERING** AS IF IN PREMONITION OF THE COMING STORM. A FOUL AND DECAYING **FETOR** ROSE IN MISTS AND DRIFTED THROUGH THE DARK, WOODED ALLEYS. **GHOULISH** SHADOWS TWISTED AND DANCED, WITH DISORIENTING EFFECT. WHAT FEARSOME UNKNOWN MIGHT BE **OBSCURED** IN THE MENACING DEPTHS?

THERE WAS A WRITHING **SERPENT** OF A POOR ROAD LAID DOWN MANY YEARS AGO, AS IF BY SOME **INSANE DEMON**. A SMALL MOTOR CAR TIMIDLY PENETRATED THE MASS OF **MOROSE** TREES. THE MORBID LANDSCAPE **LEERED** BACK AT THE INTRUDER. STRANGE, **UNNATURALLY** THICK VEGETATION OVERHUNG THE PATH **MENACINGLY**, INCREASING AS THE DRIVER ADVANCED INTO THE **OMINOUS** WILDERNESS.





HIGH ABOVE THE FOGGY TREES
SOMETHING FLUTTERED AND DRIFTED
IN THE WARM AIR. IT DESCENDED
WITH SOME APPARENT INTENT.





AAH!!

WHAP!

OWH! DAMN IT!
WHAT THE HELL
WAS THAT?



BUT THE CAR
NOW OFFERED
NO ESCAPE.



V-V-V-VV-RR-61



NOW WHAT? I GUESS
I'LL HAVE TO *WALK* THE
REST OF THE WAY. BUT
HOW FAR IS IT?

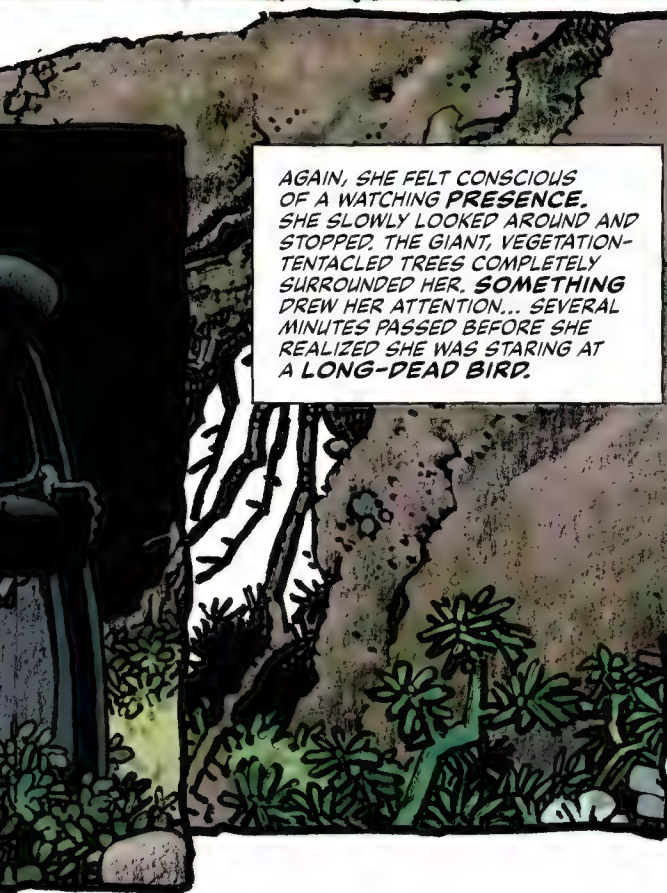




WITHOUT THE PROTECTIVE SHELL OF THE CAR, THE WOMAN SUDDENLY FELT A SENSE OF OVERPOWERING OPPRESSION--AND THAT SHE WAS BEING WATCHED.



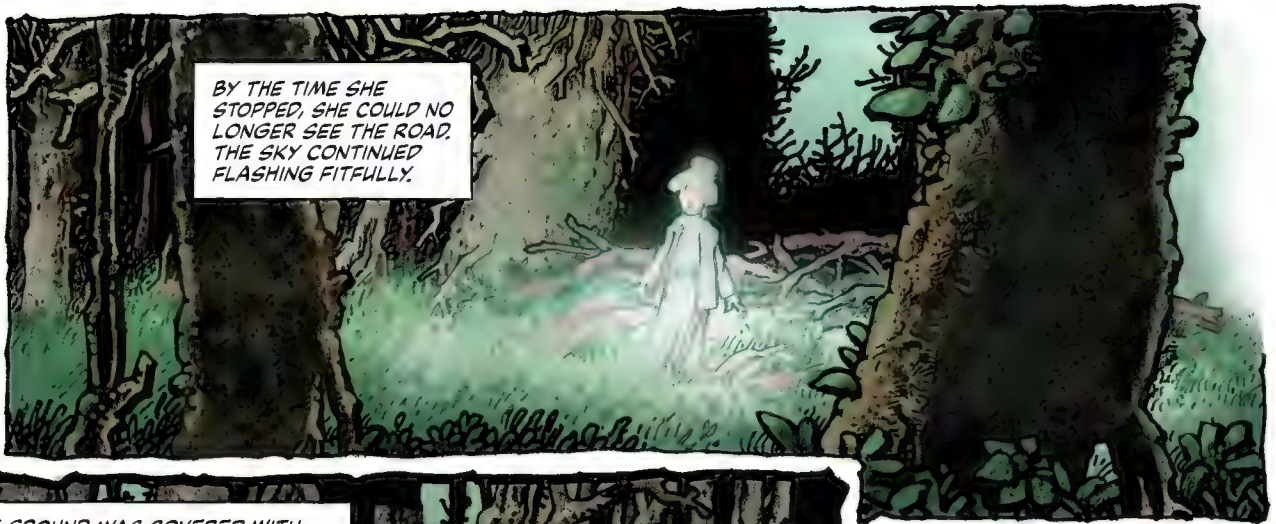
AGAIN, SHE FELT CONSCIOUS OF A WATCHING PRESENCE. SHE SLOWLY LOOKED AROUND AND STOPPED. THE GIANT, VEGETATION-TENTACLED TREES COMPLETELY SURROUNDED HER. **SOMETHING** DREW HER ATTENTION... SEVERAL MINUTES PASSED BEFORE SHE REALIZED SHE WAS STARING AT A LONG-DEAD BIRD.



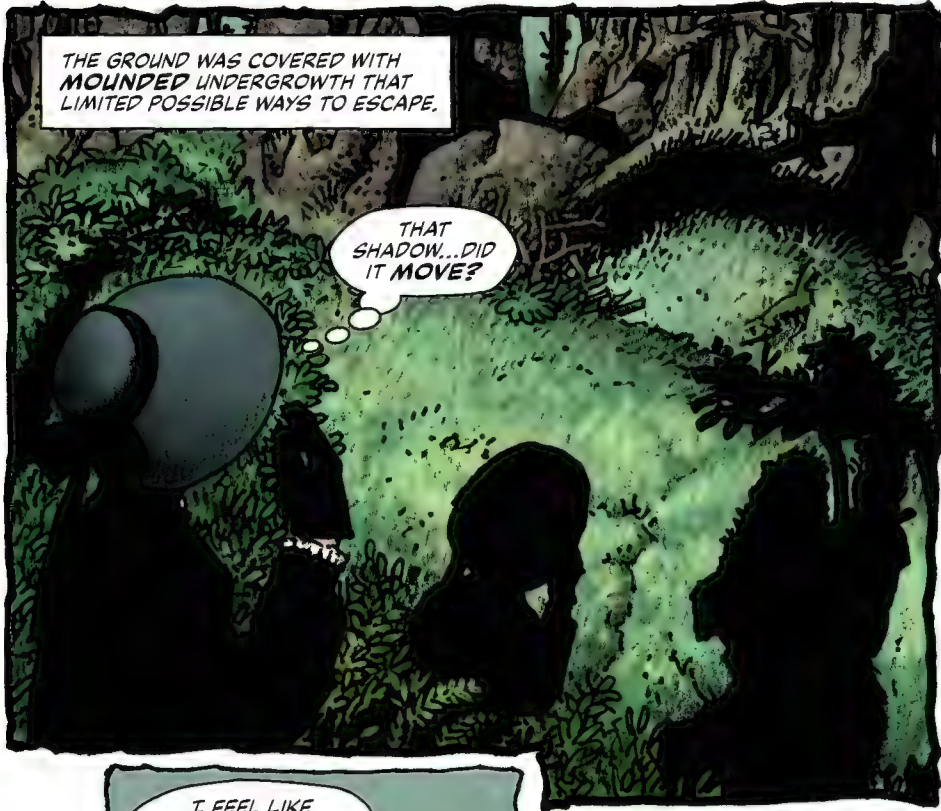
A BLINDING FLASH!



--AND SHE WAS RUNNING.



BY THE TIME SHE STOPPED, SHE COULD NO LONGER SEE THE ROAD. THE SKY CONTINUED FLASHING FITFULLY.



THE GROUND WAS COVERED WITH **MOUNDED** UNDERGROWTH THAT LIMITED POSSIBLE WAYS TO ESCAPE.

THAT SHADOW... DID IT MOVE?



THE FREQUENT LIGHTNING FLASHES CONFUSED HER PERCEPTION, SUGGESTING A **WEIRD**, FLUTTERING LIFE THAT KEPT PACE WITH HER.



I FEEL LIKE **HORRIBLE** THINGS HAVE HAPPENED HERE.



IS THAT A **TREE?** OR IS THAT SOMETHING **BEHIND** THE **TREE?**



IT'S **MOVING!** I KNOW IT.



XERA TREMBLED IN APPREHENSION
AS THE SHADOWED FIGURE ADVANCED
WITH RELENTLESS DETERMINATION.

WH-WHO ARE
YOU? WHAT DO
YOU WANT?

AAIEEEH!

WHAT'S THE MATTER,
XERA? YOU LOOK AS THOUGH
YOU'VE SEEN A GHOST! DON'T
YOU KNOW *ME*? I'M YOUR
BROTHER NOAH.

NOAH?!
I CAN'T
BELIEVE IT.

NONE OF THE OTHERS
EXPECTED YOU TO COME, BUT
I KNEW YOU *WOULD*. COME
ON *OUT* OF THERE.



A STUNNING, INTENSE
WHITE FLASH **SHOCKED**
THE TIGHTLY CLUTTERED
WOODLAND FOLIAGE
WITH CYCLOPEAN RAGE.



SLOWLY, IMAGES GRADUALLY REFORMED,
REVEALING THE SMALL TRAVELERS SEARCHING
THEIR WAY THROUGH THE DENSE UNDERGROWTH.
THEY ADVANCED TENTATIVELY, FREQUENTLY
PAUSING WITH INDECISION AND FEAR.



I THOUGHT
YOU KNEW
THE WAY.

I DO, BUT
THE PATH IS
CONTINUALLY
CHANGING. WE
MUST BE
CAREFUL.

BUT WE COULD JUST BE
GETTING FURTHER INTO THIS
TANGLED **MESS**. AND I GET THE
FEELING SOMETHING ELSE
UNNATURALLY **QUEER** IS OUT
THERE FOLLOWING US.



THERE!
THAT'S THE
CEMETERY, THE
BACK GATE.



OH, **GREAT!**
IT'S RAINING. I
HAVE AN UMBRELLA
IN MY CAR, FOR ALL
THE GOOD IT'LL DO
US NOW.

I THINK IT'S
GOING TO KEEP UP
FOR A WHILE.



THE CEMETERY
HAS BECOME
OVERGROWN. DOESN'T
ANYONE TAKE CARE
OF IT?



THE TREES HERE
ARE UNHEALTHY AND
SWOLLEN. THEY SUCK
AN **EVIL**, LOATHSOME
NOURISHMENT FROM
BELOW.



WHAT A **HORRIBLE**
THOUGHT! YOU'VE BECOME
AWFULLY **MORBID** WHILE
I WAS GONE.

WHAT WAS
THAT?



BACK
THERE!
DIDN'T YOU
HEAR IT?

WE
SHOULD
HURRY.

THERE! THE
MEAGER CEREMONY
IS NEARLY OVER.

"DON'T CRY
FOR ME NOW I
HAVE DIED, FOR I'M
STILL HERE; I'M BY
YOUR SIDE,

WHO
ARE THESE
PEOPLE? I
DON'T KNOW
ANY OF
THEM.

IT'S BEEN
YEARS, XERA.
BUT I THINK
YOU KNOW
THEM.

THAT'S
THE REVEREND
MOSES HOQUE,
READING THE
POEM.


"I AM STILL HERE;
I'M ALL AROUND, ONLY
MY BODY LIES IN THE
GROUND."

LOOK, FURBOL.
ISN'T THAT XERA
AFTER ALL THESE
YEARS?



"I AM THE RAIN
REFRESHING THE EARTH,
I AM THE LAUGHTER; I
AM THE MIRTH.





"MY BODY'S GONE
BUT MY SOUL IS HERE,
PLEASE DON'T SHED
ANOTHER TEAR."

I BELIEVE
YOU'RE RIGHT.

YOU REMEMBER OUR
COOK, HENNA CLUGG--AND
THE HANDYMAN, FURBOL
HANQUE.

AND THAT'S
MA'S LAWYER,
TITUS WURDON.

AND MA'S
GOOD FRIENDS,
OPNA AND EMIL
LAWSON.

"I AM THE BIRD
UP IN THE SKY, I AM
THE CLOUD THAT'S
DRIFTING BY. I AM THE
THOUGHTS INSIDE YOUR
HEAD, WHILE I'M STILL
THERE, I CAN'T BE
DEAD."



THEY'RE COMING OVER, SIS. TRY TO PULL YOURSELF TOGETHER.

XERA, DEAR, IS THAT YOU?



YES, HENNA. I'M BACK. I REMEMBER YOU--I COULD NEVER FORGET YOUR WONDERFUL COOKIES.

WE ALL HAVE MISSED YOU SO MUCH.



YOU TWO WERE OUR SECOND PARENTS. IT BROKE MY HEART TO LEAVE YOU BACK-- I--

HELLO, LITTLE MISSY. YOU'VE REALLY GROWN, CHILD.



WILL YOU BE STAYING IN TOWN, DEAR? WE'D LOVE TO VISIT WITH YOU FOR A WHILE.



WE COULD GIVE YOU A LIFT, BUT FURBOL VOLUNTEERED TO DO THE BURYING FIRST.



NO. I'LL BE STAYING AT THE HOUSE--WHAT WAS THAT?



DIDN'T YOU HEAR THAT? IT'S A CHILD, CRYING--BACK THERE AMONG THE GRAVES.

HELP!
HELP ME!
PLEASE.

THERE
SHE IS!

IT'S
COMING! IT
WANTS TO
GET ME!

WAAAAHHH!!!

COME HERE. NOTHING
WILL HARM YOU.

WAAAAHHH!!!

OH, YOU'RE SO
COLD, DEAR. LET
ME WARM YOU.

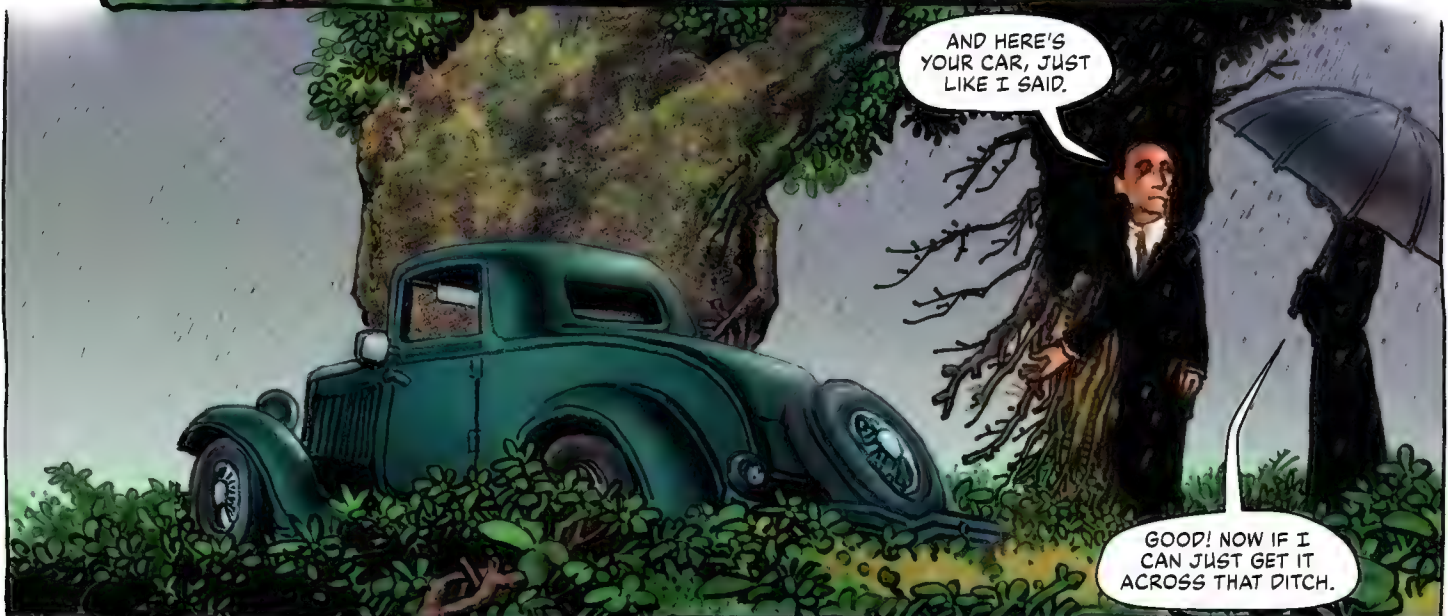
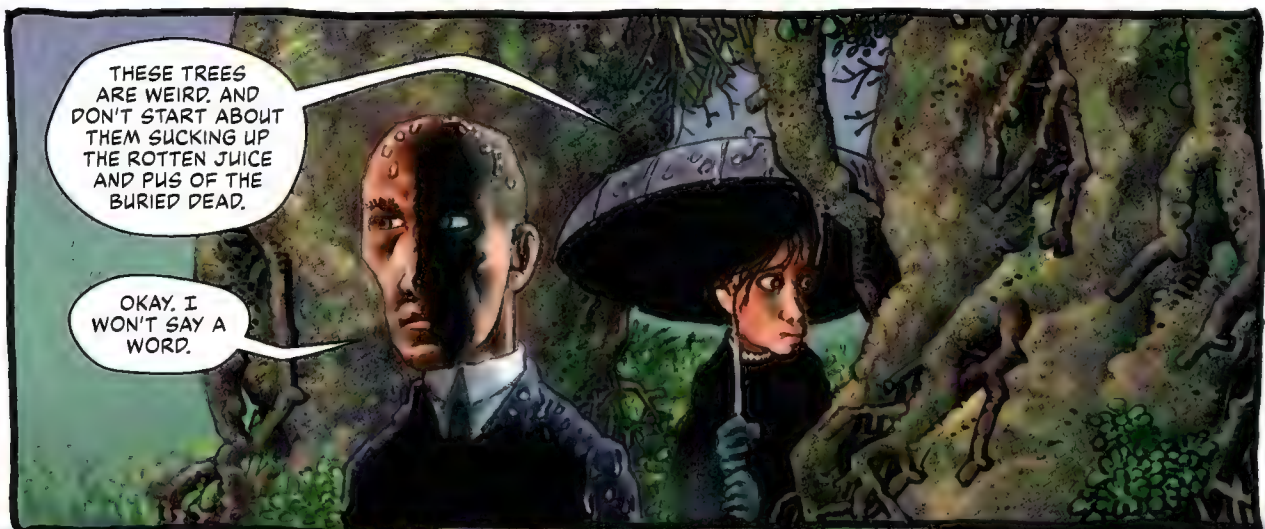
WHAT HAS
FRIGHTENED
YOU SO?

THE
DIMWOOD DEVIL
IS CHASING
ME! IT WANTS
TO EAT ME!

IT'S LITTLE
KAREN MURSTON.
I'LL TAKE HER
HOME.

HERE, XERA. I
WON'T BE ABLE TO
USE THIS WHILE I'M
SHOVELING.





THE AFTERNOON SUN SENT FEEBLE, TATTERED RAYS OVER THE DRIPPING MORASS. REVEREND HOQUE'S WET LIMOUSINE CREEPT CAREFULLY THROUGH THE RUTTED MUDDY POOLS DEFORMING THE UNPAVED PATH.

PRAISE THE LORD, THE RAIN HAS STOPPED.



HERE'S YOUR HOUSE, KAREN. YOUR PARENTS WILL BE HAPPY TO SEE YOU! WHAT MADE YOU RUN OFF LIKE THAT?

WAAAAAH!

WHAT'S THE MATTER, DEAR? YOU'RE HOME NOW.



NO! NO! IT'S IN THERE! IT WILL EAT ME!



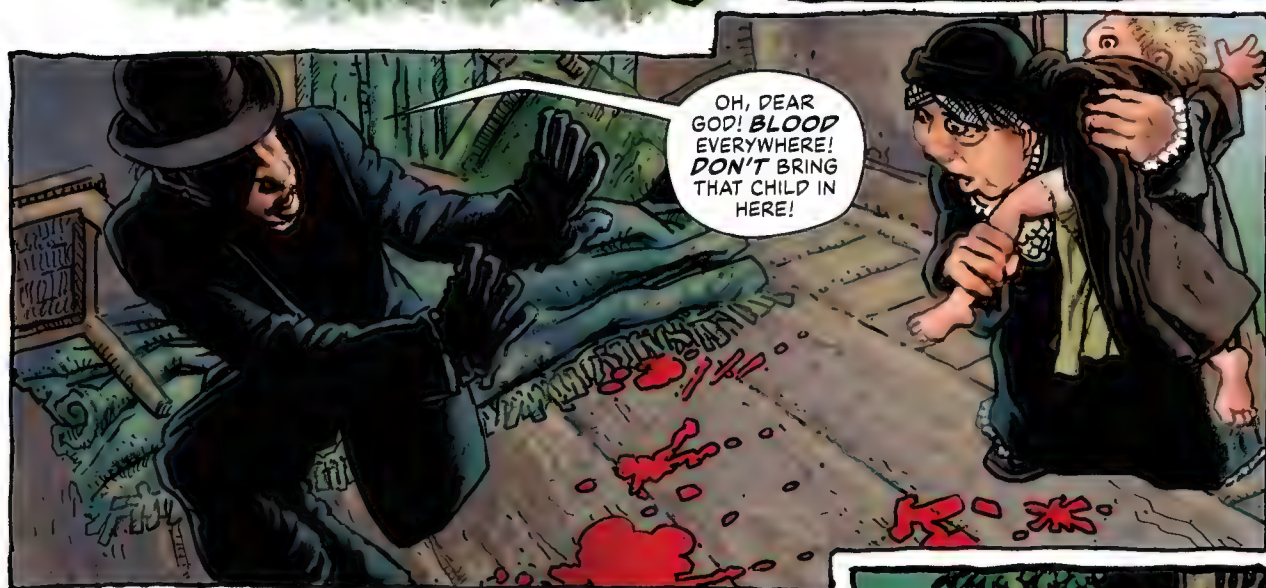
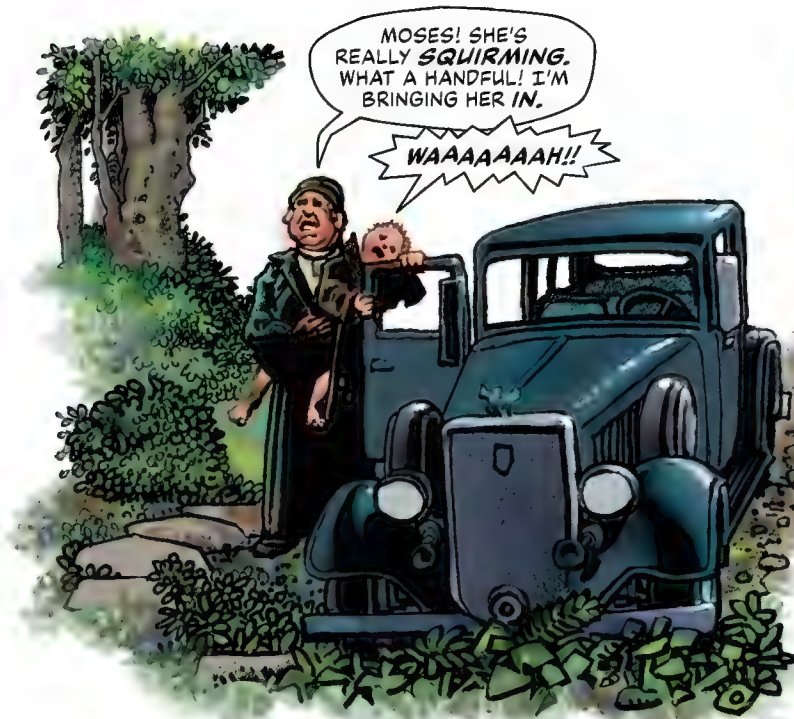
STAY WITH KAREN, DEAR. I'LL GET HER PARENTS.



THAT'S STRANGE-- THE DOOR IS AJAR.



SOMETHING SEEMS WRONG HERE. HELLO! MRS. MURSTON?





NO
TROUBLE
THIS
TIME.



ONLY THANKS
TO *MY* MORAL
SUPPORT...OR
PERHAPS IT'S YOUR
SILVESTRO SPIRIT
HELPING YOU.



THE
DRIVE SEEMS
LONGER
THAN THE
WALK WE JUST
FINISHED.



XERA, I
THINK YOU
SHOULD GET
A ROOM IN
TOWN.

NONSENSE! I
WANT TO SEE THE OLD
PLACE. I HAVE SOME
GOOD MEMORIES FROM
THOSE OLD TIMES--



--AND
SOME
BAD.



~HMPH!~



HENNA AND
FURBOL HAVE
MOVED OUT.
YOU'LL BE
ALONE.

NO, I WON'T.
YOU'LL BE
THERE.



WHY DID
YOU STOP?

IT'S JUST--
SOMETHING. WHAT'S
THAT **STUFF** ALL
OVER THE--

--HOUSE?

THAT IS A **FUNGI** THAT HAS TAKEN HOLD OF THE ANCIENT WOOD, ACCELERATING THE DECAY. FURBOL CAN'T SEEM TO GET RID OF IT...THERE'S SOMETHING **LOATHSOME** AND CREEPING ABOUT IT.

XERA, SWEETIE, WE'RE SO **HAPPY** TO SEE YOU!

YOU'VE **REALLY** GROWN, GIRL.

HASN'T SHE THOUGH! SUCH A LOVELY YOUNG LADY!

WE'RE STAYING OVER AT MABEL HENCHLE'S BOARDING HOUSE. WON'T YOU JOIN US THERE?

NO, HENNA. I'LL BE **FINE** HERE.

IF YOU'RE **DETERMINED** TO STAY, I'LL GET YOUR BAGS.

YES, I'M **STAYING**.

VERY WELL, DEAR. I'VE CLEANED YOUR ROOM A BIT, AND THERE'S SOME DINNER ON THE TABLE.

WE'LL BE BACK IN THE MORNING. WE'LL KEEP THINGS UP FOR YOU AS LONG AS YOU'RE HERE. BYE, NOW.



WONDERFUL!
I HAVEN'T EATEN ALL
DAY. SHALL WE?

WAIT A MINUTE--
SHE ONLY SET **ONE**
PLACE. **ODD** FOR
HENNA TO MAKE A
MISTAKE!

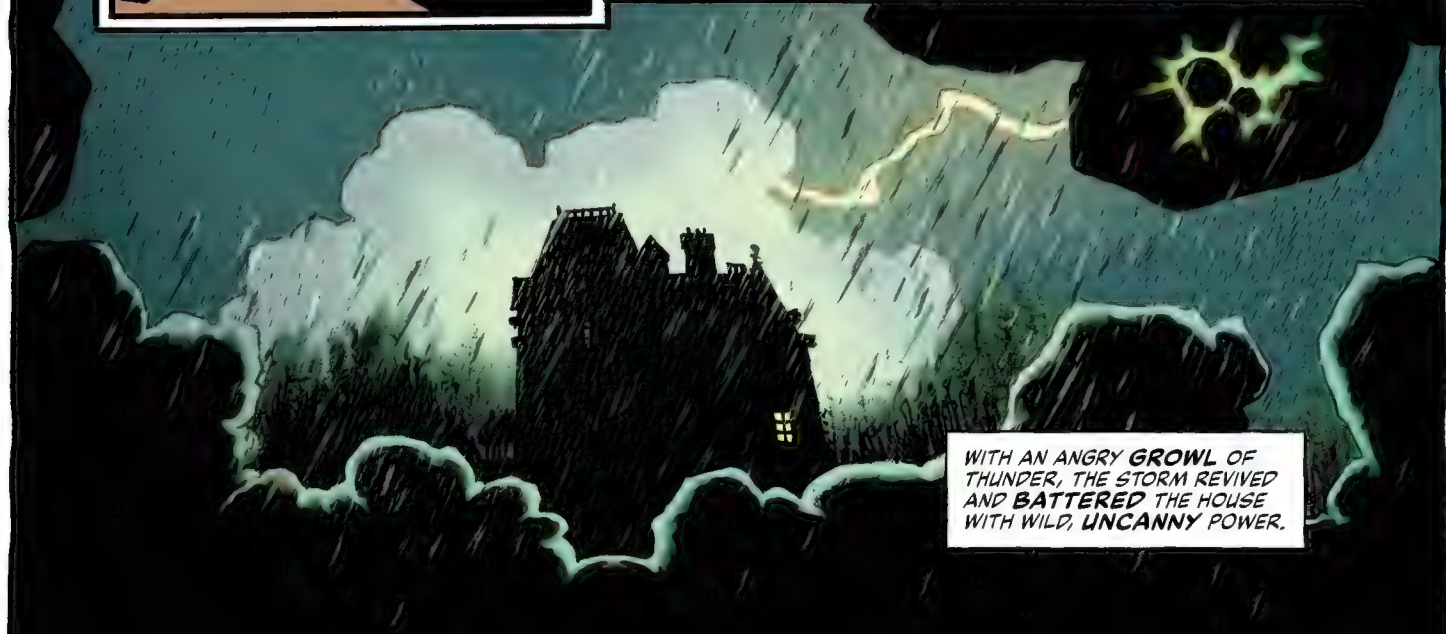


I--WELL, I ATE **EARLIER**.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME.

MMM! **STEW**. HENNA'S
COOKING IS THE **BEST**. WON'T
YOU HAVE SOME?



I THINK I'LL
RETIRE. YOU PROBABLY
WANT TO DO SOME
UNPACKING AFTER SUPPER.
I'LL BE IN MY ROOM.



WITH AN **ANGRY GROWL** OF
THUNDER, THE STORM REVIVED
AND **BATTERED** THE HOUSE
WITH WILD, **UNCANNY** POWER.

XERA FELT MORBIDLY ALONE AND SMALL AS SHE CLIMBED INTO THE UPPER CAVERNS OF THE GLOOM-SHROUDED, DECAYING STRUCTURE.

I GUESS I KNOW WHERE EVERYTHING IS, BUT IT SEEMS UNFRIENDLY AND OMINOUS, SOMEHOW. I THINK NOAH'S MOOD HAS INFECTED ME.

WHAT IN THE WORLD? THE UPPER FLOORS ARE BLOCKED OFF.

JUST A BREATH OF A DRAFT CAUSES THE DOORS TO MOVE, SEEMINGLY OF THEIR OWN VOLITION.

LET'S SEE. THE BEDROOMS ARE THIS WAY?

OH!

A GIGANTIC, LEERING FIGURE WITH A PALPABLE, FOUL, CHARNEL **STENCH**...XERA STAGGERED BACK. SHE FACED HER HATED **STEPPFATHER**, VIRGIL DIM, **GHASTLY** AND **DEMONIACAL**, STARING BACK AT HER.



NOOOH!
DAMN YOU, YOU
EVIL **BASTARD!**
I HOPE YOU'RE
BURNING IN THE
HOTTEST PIT OF
HELL!



TORRENTIAL RAIN LASHED THE DIMWOOD HOUSE AS THE WIND SHRIEKED AND HOWLED AROUND THE SHUDDERING MANSION. THE STORM, PRIMORDIAL IN ITS COSMIC POWER, ATTACKED THE STRUCTURE...

...YET SOMEHOW THE HOUSE WITHSTOOD THE ASSAULT, WITH UNNATURAL TENACITY.



SHE STIRRED SLIGHTLY FROM A COZY, WARM DREAM. AN INSISTENT RUSTLING DREW HER INTO A CHILLED, TENSE AWARENESS.

VOICES! HE MUST BE MAD AGAIN.

THEY'RE RIGHT OUTSIDE IN THE HALL. SHOULD I HIDE?

NOAH!

AAAHH!

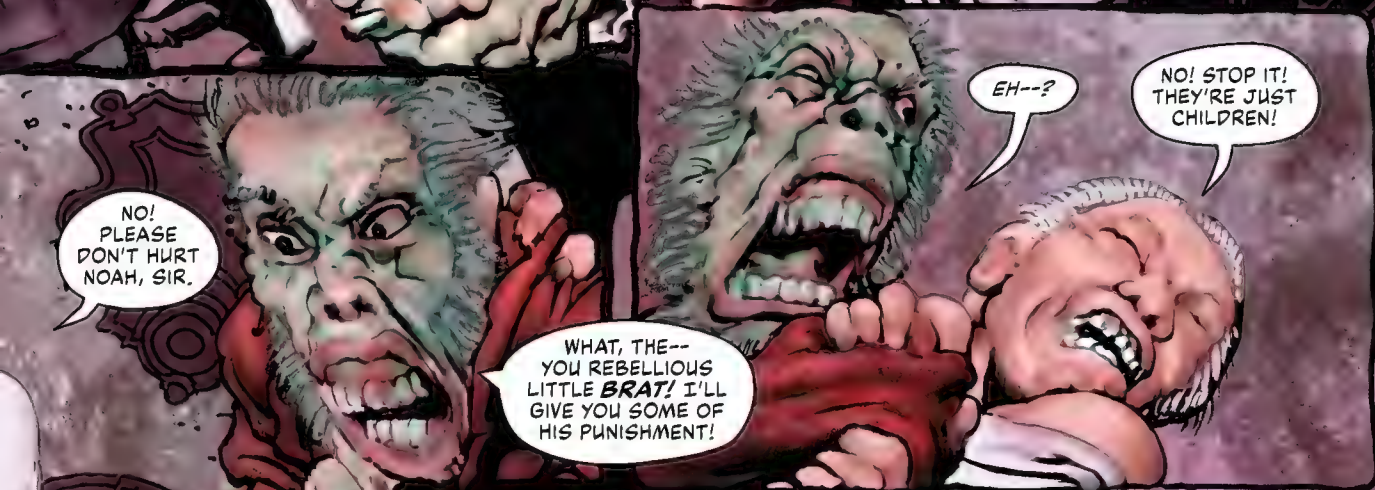
WIAKT

SILENTLY, THE DOOR OPENED--
SLOW AND DREAMLIKE, LITTLE XERA
DRIFTED IRRESISTIBLY TO THE GAP.



YOU LITTLE **FART**!
TRY TO STOP ME, WILL
YOU? I'LL **RIP YOUR**
HEAD OFF!

LEAVE HIM
ALONE, YOU
MONSTER! HE WAS
JUST TRYING
PROTECT ME!



NO!
PLEASE
DON'T HURT
NOAH, SIR.

WHAT, THE--
YOU REBELLIOUS
LITTLE **BRAT**! I'LL
GIVE YOU SOME OF
HIS PUNISHMENT!

EH--?

NO! STOP IT!
THEY'RE JUST
CHILDREN!



YOU
BITCH!





COME ON,
XERA! WE HAVE
TO DO WHAT
SHE SAYS!



WE HAVE
TO RUN
FAST! HE
WON'T GET
US.



HA, HA,
HA, HA!!

XERA,
YOU GO BY
THE CREEK
PATH!



--AND
EAT THEM!
HA, HA, HA!



I'LL LEAD
HIM INTO THE
THICKET. IF YOU
SEE HIM, HIDE!

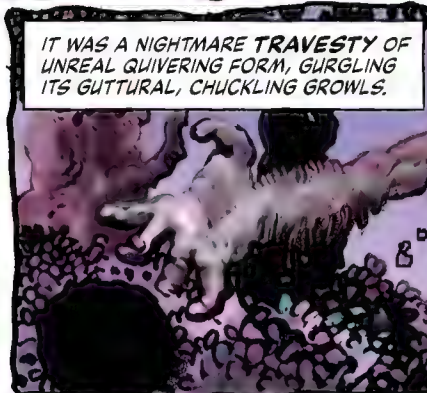


PLEASE,
DON'T LET
HIM HURT
MOMMY!



AAH!

A DARK, FEARSOME
MASS SHAMBLED
INTO HER PATH.

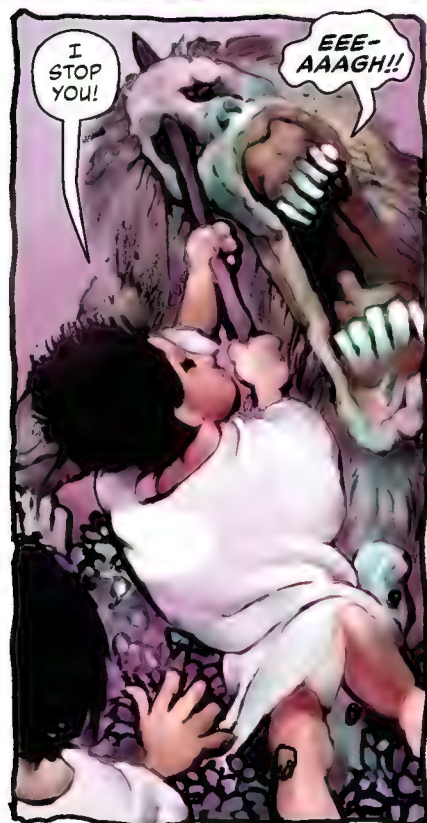


IT WAS A NIGHTMARE **TRAVESTY** OF
UNREAL QUIVERING FORM, GURGLING
ITS GUTTURAL, CHUCKLING GROWLS.



HRGH-GH-
GH-GH!!

G--
GOT YU--
ERGH!!



I
STOP
YOU!

EEE-
AAAGH!!



Y-YOUUU
FFIIRRSS--

NO!
AH!



CRUNCH!!

AAAACK!!

AAAAAIIIEEHH!



THE YOUNG WOMAN WAS ALONE IN HER ROOM. THERE WAS NO MONSTER. LIGHTNING FLASHED AS THE RAIN BEAT AGAINST THE HOUSE AND WINDOWS.



BUT SHE FELT NO SAFETY OR ASSURANCE--RATHER A TENSE APPREHENSION.

I'M SURE I PACKED IT.



THERE!



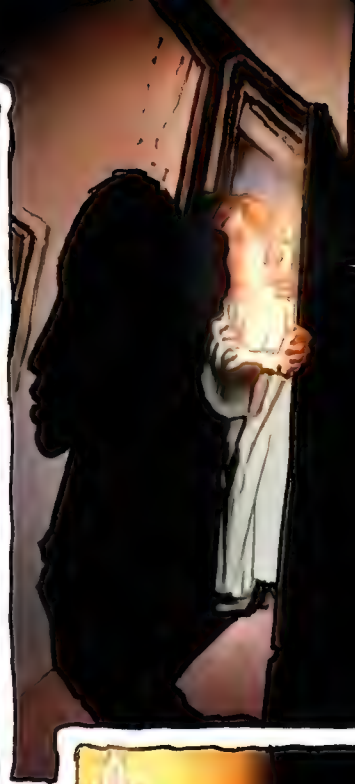
SHE CREPT NERVOUSLY INTO THE STYGIAN HALL.



HIS ROOM WAS DOWN THIS WAY.



TAP TAP TAP



NOAH! NOAH,
ARE YOU IN HERE?
NOAH?



NOAH, I
WANT TO TALK
TO YOU.



WHERE
ARE YOU?



KRAK-AK-AK-KRAK-BOOM!!



NOAH! THERE YOU ARE. BUT -- WHY ARE YOU JUST SITTING IN THE DARK?

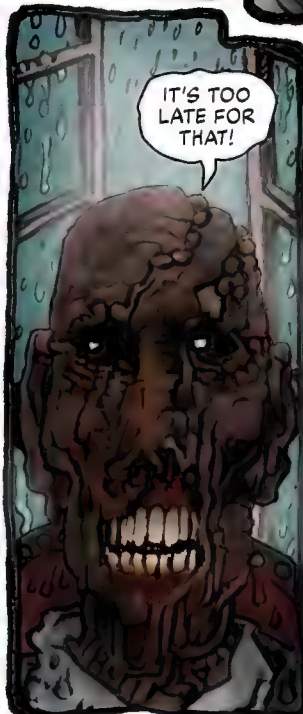


HELLO, XERA. IN THE DARK, YOU SAY? I HADN'T NOTICED.

IT'S A--HAVE YOU EVER HEARD OF **LYGOPHILIA**? SOMETIMES I JUST LIKE GO INTO A REVERIE AND DREAM.



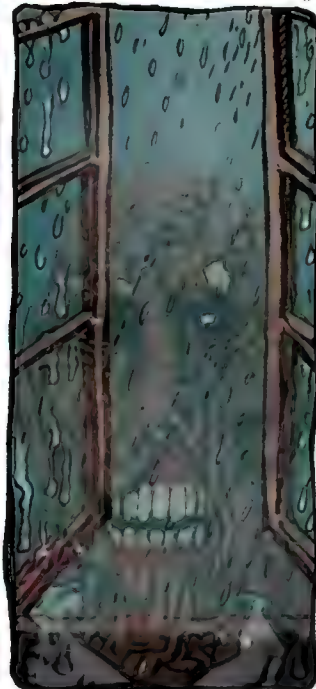
ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT? YOU'LL CATCH YOUR **DEATH** FROM THE RAIN BLOWING IN--



IT'S TOO LATE FOR THAT!



BEWARE FOR YOURSELF!



GASP!

A BRIGHT, CLEAR MORNING OPENED UP THE SKY. THE RAIN HAD **CLEANED** THE AIR AND ALL WAS **CRISP** AND **EXHILARATING**. A **CACOPHONY** OF CHATTERING AND SINGING BIRDS GAVE AN AIR OF **HAPPINESS** AND WELL-BEING.

XERA'S STRANGE DREAMS OF THE NIGHT WERE EASILY **DISMISSED**.

OH MY GOD! IS THAT **COFFEE** AND **HAM** I SMELL COOKING?

OH, HENNA, I THOUGHT I HAD GONE TO **HEAVEN** WHEN I SMELLED YOUR **BREAKFAST**.

THANK YOU, DEAR. I HOPE YOU LIKE IT. IT WILL BE JUST LIKE **OLD TIMES**. I REMEMBER YOU LIKED YOUR EGGS **FIRM-COOKED**.

THIS IS WONDERFUL!

BUT HENNA, YOU DIDN'T SET A PLACE FOR **NOAH**.

WHY, XERA, WHATEVER MADE YOU SAY **SUCH** A THING?

DIDN'T YOUR
MOTHER WRITE
TO YOU ABOUT
NOAH?



NO. COME SIT
WITH ME, AND
TELL ME--WHAT
HAPPENED?

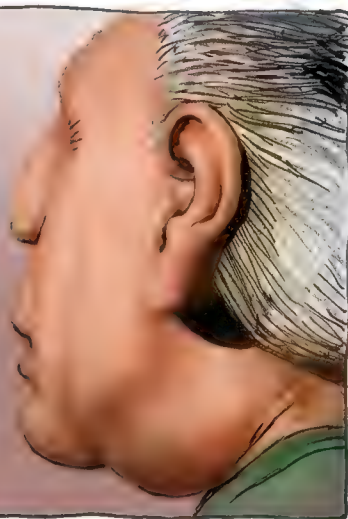
OH, DEAR,
I'M SO **SORRY**
TO HAVE TO TELL
YOU THIS.



NOAH
DISAPPEARED JUST
MONTHS AFTER THEY
TOOK YOU AWAY. WITH THE
WAY THINGS WERE, WE
ALL THOUGHT HE JUST
RAN AWAY.

OR HE GOT
LOST IN THE
WOODS.

WE HAVEN'T
SEEN HIM FOR
FIFTEEN
YEARS.



THERE
HASN'T BEEN
A **TRACE.**

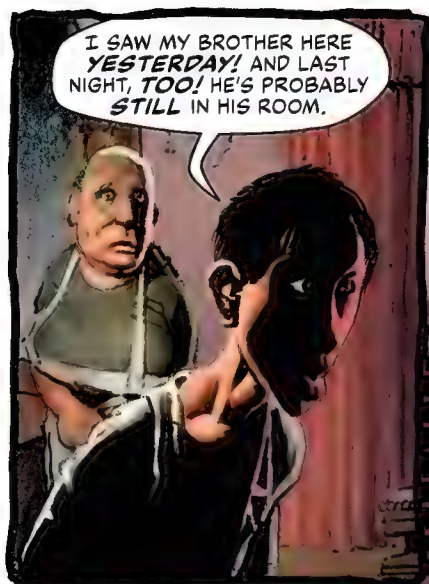


WHAT ARE YOU
SAYING? DIDN'T YOU **SEE**
HIM AT THE **GRAVEYARD**
WITH ME?



THIS
MAKES **NO**
SENSE.
I DON'T
BELIEVE
IT.





I SAW MY BROTHER HERE
YESTERDAY! AND LAST
NIGHT, **TOO!** HE'S PROBABLY
STILL IN HIS ROOM.

NOAH!



WHAT ON
EARTH HAS
GOTTEN INTO
THAT CHILD?



NOAH!

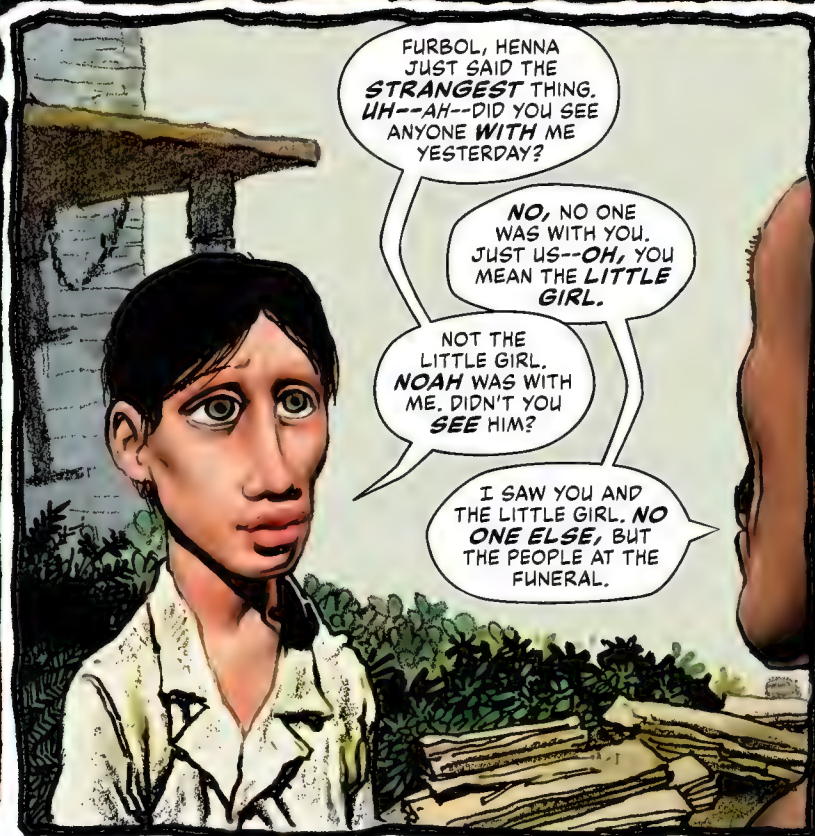
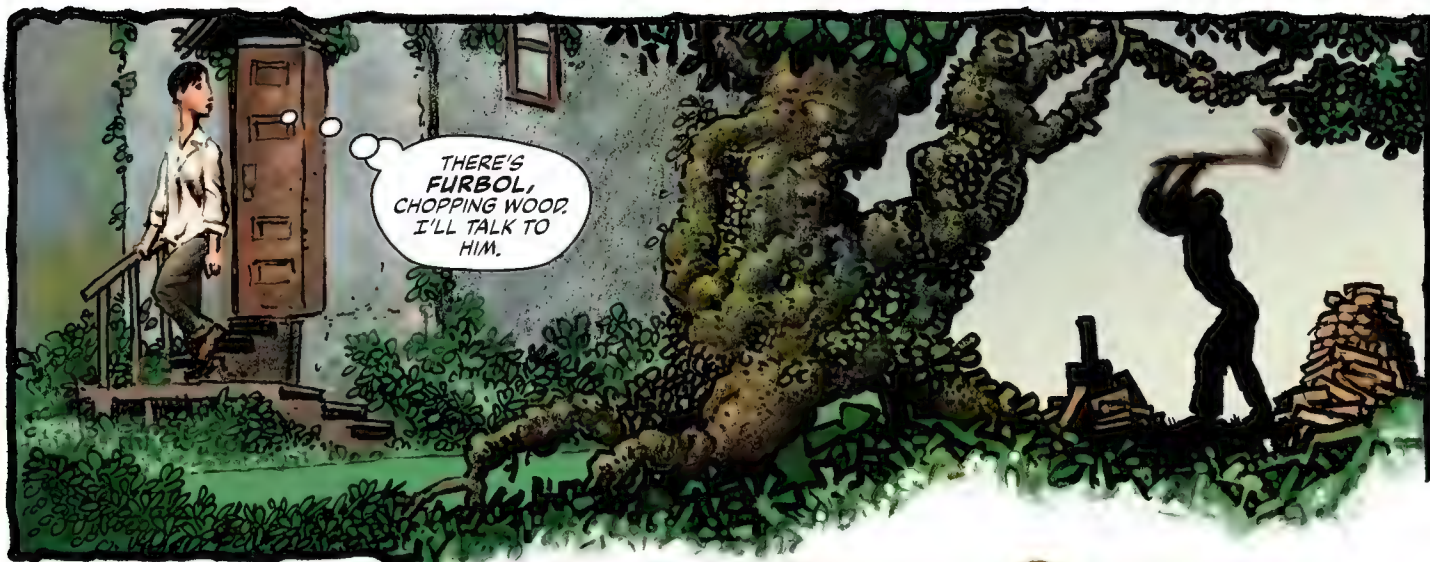


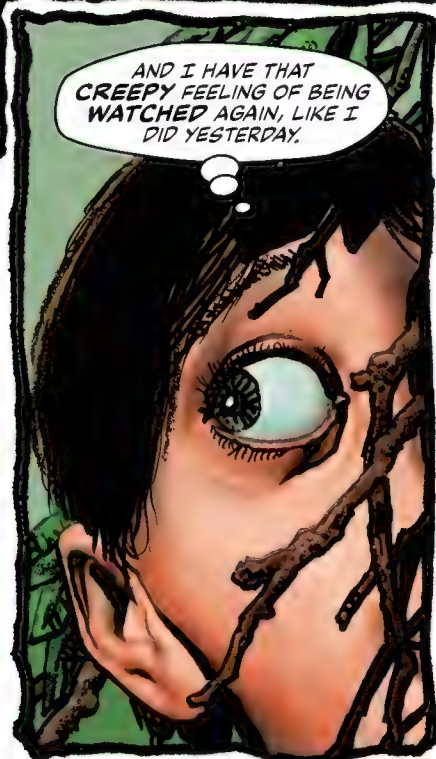
I'VE
GOT TO
CLEAR MY
HEAD.



I'M
GOING FOR
A WALK,
HENNA.

OH, DEAR, PLEASE
DON'T WALK IN THE
WOODS! CAN'T I GET
SOMETHING FOR YOU,
XERA?

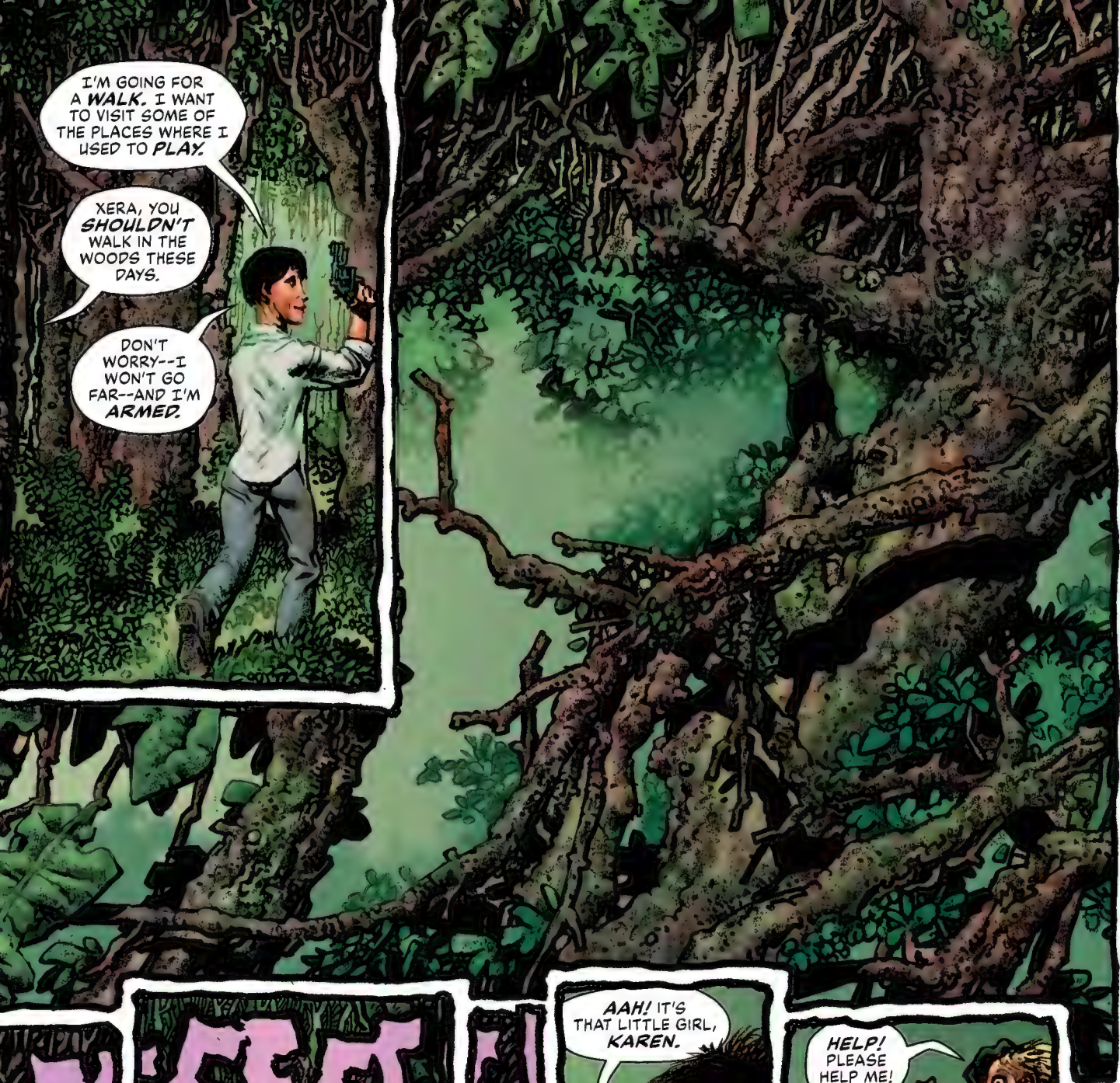




I'M GOING FOR
A **WALK**. I WANT
TO VISIT SOME OF
THE PLACES WHERE I
USED TO **PLAY**.

XERA, YOU
SHOULDN'T
WALK IN THE
WOODS THESE
DAYS.

DON'T
WORRY--I
WON'T GO
FAR--AND I'M
ARMED.



AAH! IT'S
THAT LITTLE GIRL,
KAREN.



HELP!
PLEASE
HELP ME!





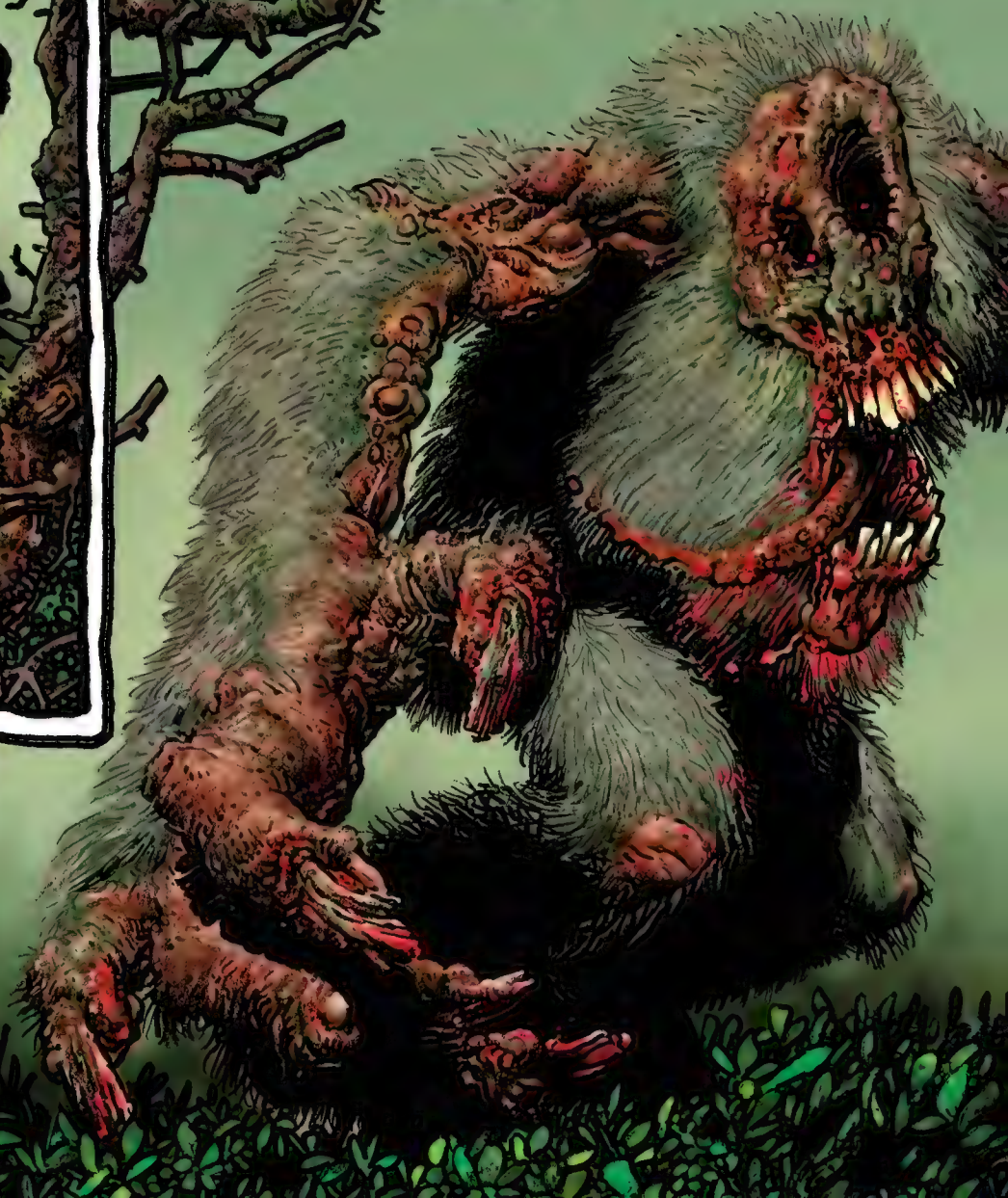
XERA WAS
STUNNED BY
WHAT SHE
SAW.

MRS. HOQUE,
WHAT'S ALL THIS
BLOOD? WHAT
HAPPENED?

MY HUSBAND'S
BEEN HURT! SOME
KIND OF ANIMAL
ATTACKED US!



SOMETHING
MOVED OUT
OF THE
SHADOWS...





STAGGERING
FORWARD
AWKWARDLY,



CAME THE HORRID CREATURE
OF XERA'S NIGHTMARES,


GROWLING WITH
HIDEOUS INTENT.




XERA DIDN'T
HESITATE--SHE
FIRED FOUR .32
CALIBER BULLETS
INTO THE BEAST.

BAM!
BAM!
BAM!

BAM!



XERA HAD JUST PUT
FOUR BULLETS INTO THE
MONSTER, BUT IT WAS
WEIRDLY **UNAFFECTED**
BY THE SHOTS. THE
UNCANNY BEAST WAS
INTENT ON THE BLOODY
BODY SPRAWLED IN
THE GRASS.

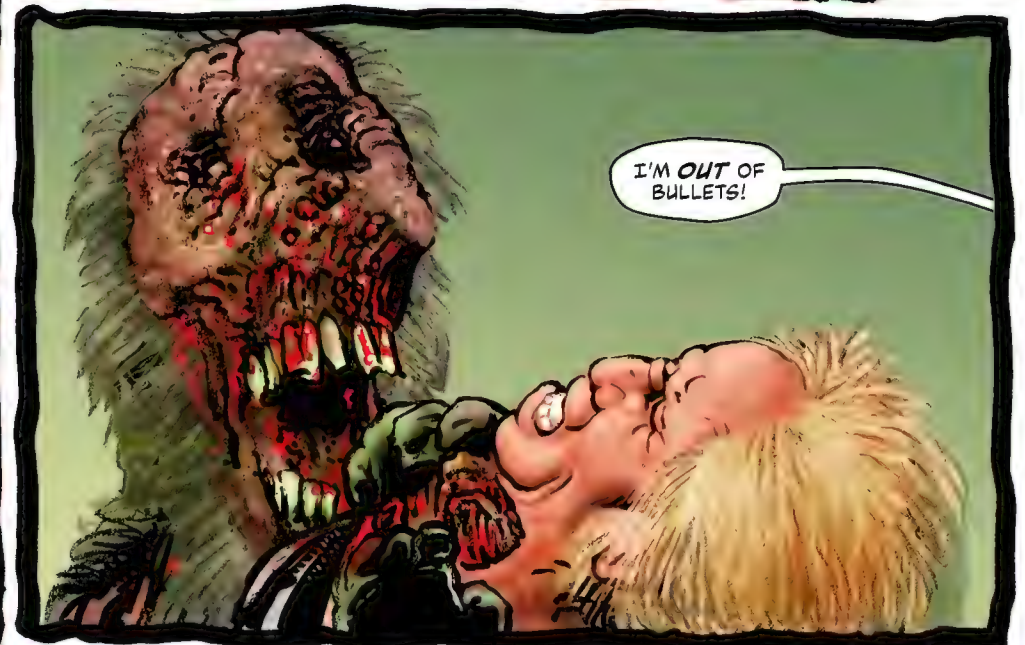


IT HORRIFICALLY **TWISTED**
THE REVEREND'S HEAD AND
BIT DEEPLY INTO THE **SKULL**,
SPRAYING BRAIN TISSUE
IN A FOUNTAIN OF **GORE**.

XERA TRIED TO PULL THE HYSTERICAL WOMAN AWAY FROM THE VIOLENT SCENE, BUT SHE RASHLY CHARGED FORWARD.



ENRAGED, SHE THREW HERSELF AT THE MONSTER, BATTERING AT THE MASSIVE FORM.



PULL
HARD, MAMIE!
HARDER!!



KICK AT IT!
WE'RE ALMOST
LOOSE!



BLAM!

SOMETHING
SLAMMED INTO
THE BEAST, AND IT
REELED IN SHOCK.



ITS BLOOD
SPATTERED THE
GRASS AS IT
QUIVERED WITH
UNFAMILIAR PAIN.



THERE!
COME ON!



A COUGHING
GIGGLE GURGLED
FROM THE
ABOMINATION'S
TWISTED THROAT
AS IT ROSE AND
CRAWLED
TOWARD THE
WOMEN.



WHAT? WHAT
HAPPENED?



XERA! MRS.
HOQUE! ARE YOU
ALL RIGHT?

FURBOL!

WELL, FOLKS, IT LOOKS LIKE THE **DIMWOOD DEVIL** HAS RETURNED! IT'S BEEN A YEAR SINCE WE'VE HAD ANY DISAPPEARANCES, AND I'D **HOPED** WE WERE FINISHED WITH THIS **MESS**. APPARENTLY NOT!

THE REVEREND HOQUE WAS **KILLED** THIS MORNING BY SOME UNKNOWN **ANIMAL** OR **PSYCHOTIC PERSON**. MRS. HOQUE WAS **INJURED**, AND WAS TAKEN TO THE HOSPITAL IN DIRVETT. WE ONLY HAVE A **HANDFUL** OF PEOPLE, BUT I THINK IT'S BETTER TO GET **STARTED** WITH THE SEARCH AS **QUICKLY** AS POSSIBLE.

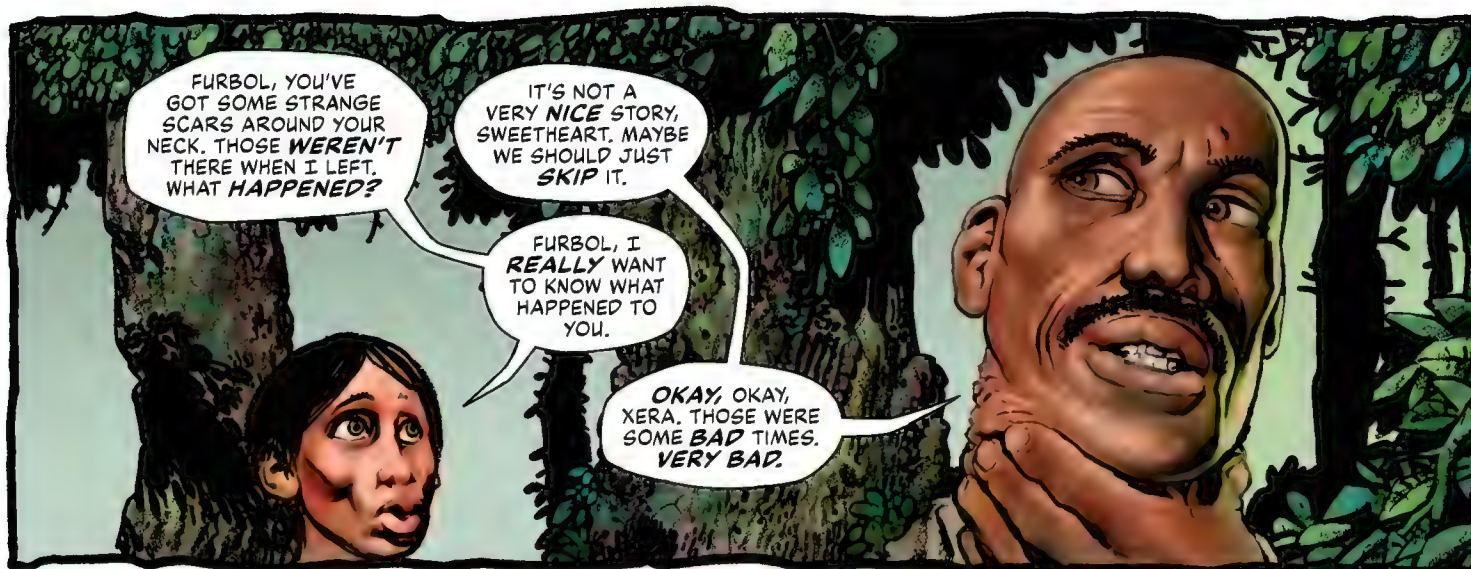
FURBOL GOT A COUPLE OF SHOTS INTO IT. THIS WAS ABOUT A MILE NORTH, IN **BLUE HOLLOW**, SO WE'LL START THERE. WE SHOULDN'T **UNDERESTIMATE** THIS THING, AND I DON'T WANT ANYBODY TRYING TO TAKE IT ON ALONE. IF ANYONE OF YOU **SEES** IT, JUST **SIGNAL**, AND WE'LL **ALL** COME RUNNING.

WE GOT A COUPLE HOURS BEFORE DINNER. IF THE THING IS **INJURED**, MAYBE THAT'S ALL IT WILL TAKE FOR US TO FIND IT.

OKAY, LET'S ALL HEAD TOWARDS **BLUE HOLLOW**.

I THINK IT MIGHT TAKE **ALL** OUR FIREPOWER TO TAKE DOWN THAT THING WE'RE AFTER. THANKS FOR LENDING ME THE **TWENTY-TWO**.

I DIDN'T WANT YOU FOLLOWING US WITH THAT **PISTOL**.

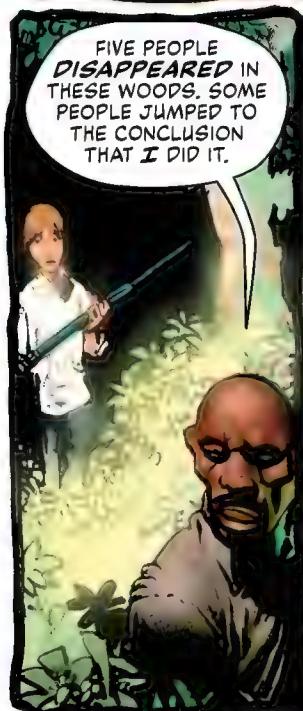


FURBOL, YOU'VE GOT SOME STRANGE SCARS AROUND YOUR NECK. THOSE **WEREN'T** THERE WHEN I LEFT. WHAT **HAPPENED?**

IT'S NOT A VERY **NICE** STORY, SWEETHEART. MAYBE WE SHOULD JUST **SKIP** IT.

FURBOL, I **REALLY** WANT TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU.

OKAY, OKAY, XERA. THOSE WERE SOME BAD TIMES. VERY BAD.



FIVE PEOPLE **DISAPPEARED** IN THESE WOODS. SOME PEOPLE JUMPED TO THE CONCLUSION THAT **I** DID IT.



THEY TRIED TO **KILL** ME.



OH, MY **GOD, FURBOL!**



YOUR **MOTHER, MRS. DIM. AND YOUR BROTHER NOAH** CUT ME DOWN AND TOOK CARE OF ME. I'M **FINE** NOW.



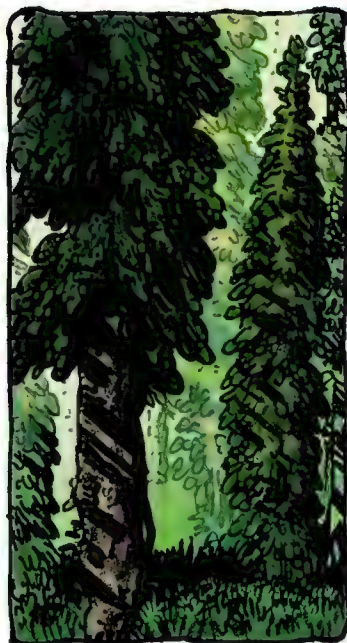
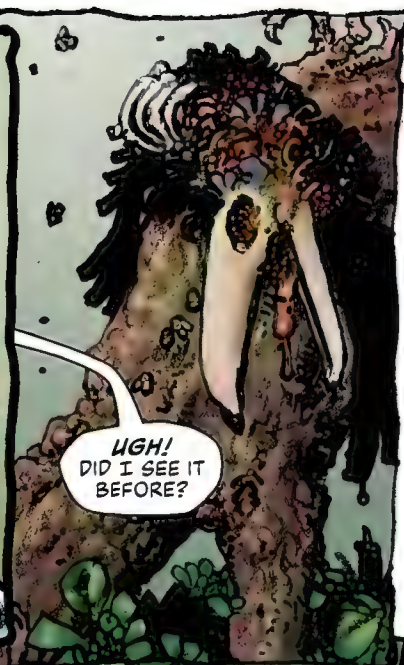
BUT--WHAT ABOUT THE **MOB** THAT **DID** IT?

I'M **OKAY, XERA. IT'S OVER** NOW.



FURBOL, THAT'S **HORRIBLE!** I DON'T UNDERSTAND--HOW CAN YOU **FORGIVE** IT?

YOU'RE **RIGHT, DEAR. I WAS ANGRY. Madder than HELL!** BUT IT'S THE **STRANGEST** THING--THOSE FOUR **DRUNKEN ASSHOLES** THAT STRUNG ME UP, WELL... THEY **DISAPPEARED, TOO. SO I'M NOT MAD** ANYMORE.





NOAH, WHAT
THE **HELL** IS GOING
ON WITH YOU?

HENNA AND
FURBOL SAID
YOU WERE
**MISSING--OR
DEAD.**



YOU'RE ACTING SO
STRANGELY--



I DON'T
ALWAYS GET
ALONG WITH
HENNA AND
FURBOL
THESE
DAYS,
SO I JUST
AVOID
THEIR
COMPANY.



BUT NOAH, WE'VE
ALWAYS **LOVED** HENNA AND
FURBOL. THEY'RE **FAMILY**.
WHAT'S THE MATTER?

I GUESS I
JUST **WANT**
TO BE
ALONE.

BUT IF
YOU NEED
ME, I'LL **BE**
THERE.



BUT WHY ARE YOU
WANDERING ALONE IN
THESE DANGEROUS
WOODS?



I FOUND YOUR NEW
LITTLE **FRIEND** OUT HERE.
I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT
LIKE TO **KNOW.**



KAREN!

ONCE AGAIN, XERA FOUND LITTLE KAREN ALONE AND AFRAID IN THE FOREST, WHERE THE HORRIFYING "DIMWOOD DEVIL" PROWLED AND MURDERED. XERA'S HEART WAS FILLED WITH SYMPATHY FOR THE LOST CHILD.

ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? DON'T FRET, DEAR. WE'LL TAKE YOU TO *SAFETY*.

YES, WE'LL FIND YOUR MOMMA. WAS SHE WITH YOU?


I THINK WE'RE IN *DANGER* HERE. THIS CLEARING DOESN'T FEEL SAFE.

KAREN, WE SHOULD TAKE YOU TO A SAFE PLACE. THEN MY *BROTHER* AND I CAN SEARCH FOR YOUR MOTHER.


FURBOL ISN'T TOO FAR AWAY. HE CAN HELP US.



MY
MOMMA IS
LOST. CAN
YOU HELP ME
FIND HER?



BUT WE GOT
TO SAVE MOMMA
FIRST! THERE'S
A **MONSTER**. I
HID FROM IT.



A **WISE**
TACTIC. ONE WE
SHOULD **ALL**
FOLLOW.

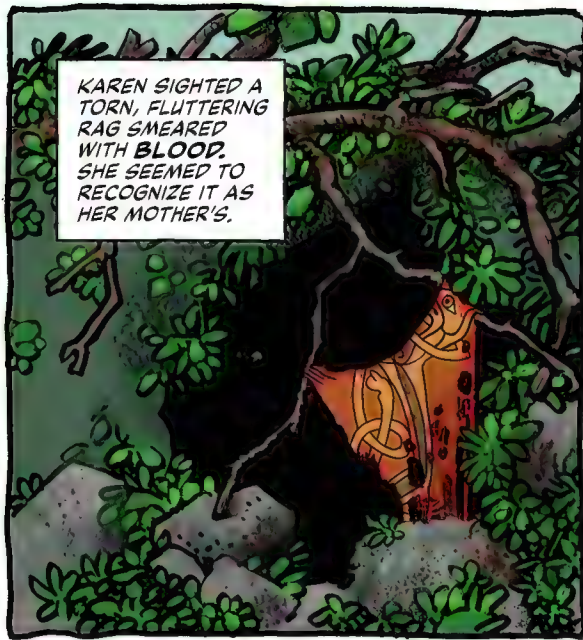


THERE!



MY
MOMMA!







HISSING DEFIANTLY, THE
MUTANT RAT DISAPPEARED
INTO THE TUNNEL.





COME
BACK UP HERE!
DAMN IT!



NOAH,
COME AND
HELP!

WHERE
DID HE GO?



I GUESS
I'LL HAVE TO
FOLLOW
HER DOWN.



XERA'S SIGNAL
SHOT ECHOED
THROUGH THE
TREES.

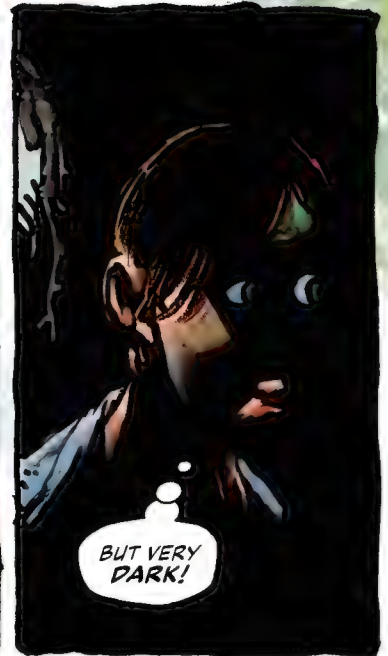
FURBOL
WILL HEAR
AND FOLLOW.



HOW FAR
DOWN IS THE
BOTTOM OF
THIS PIT?



WELL,
NOT TOO
DEEP.



BUT VERY
DARK!





KAREN!
ARE YOU
DOWN
HERE?



WHAT'S
THIS? WOOD?
**ROTTING
WOODEN
BOXES**
BURIED IN THE
EARTH.
THEY'RE ALL
AROUND ME.



THIS IS
NIGHTMARISH!
I MUST BE BELOW THE
DIMWOOD GRAVEYARD,
AND THE COFFINS
ARE EXPOSED.



**UGH! ROTTING
HUMAN BODIES!**
THESE HAVE BEEN
CHEWED!
NAUSEATING!



WHAT INHUMAN
GHOUL BUILT THIS
MAZE OF DECAYED
FLESH AND BONES?



A LANKY FIGURE
APPROACHED AND
PAUSED AT THE GAPING
BLACK CAVITY IN THE
EARTH. HE ASSESSED
THE SCENE CAREFULLY.

IT LOOKS
LIKE SHE WENT
DOWN INTO THIS
DAMNED PIT.

WHY'D SHE
HAVE TO GO AND
DO THAT? I WISH
SHE **HADN'T**.

BUT
SHE **DID**.

DAMN IT.

"THAT PIT MIGHT
GO ON FOR *MILES*.
SOME KIDS JUST DON'T
HAVE ANY *SENSE*."

GOD! I'M GLAD
TO BE AWAY FROM THAT
GRAVEYARD SECTION OF
THIS TRAIL, BUT STILL
NO SIGN OF KAREN.

XERA CALLED FOR KAREN, BUT HER
SHOUTS WERE **MUFFLED** BY THE HEAVY
SOIL AND DENSE LATTICE OF ROOTS.


AT LEAST
THERE'S NO
BLOOD.

IT SEEMS TO BE LEADING
BACK TOWARD THE
HOUSE.

KAREN!
IF YOU CAN
HEAR ME,
PLEASE
ANSWER!

WAIT!
WAS THAT
SOMETHING?

BRICKS
AND STONE! A
STRUCTURE!
I **KNEW** IT!



LOOKS LIKE THE CRUMBLING REMAINS OF SOME EARLIER SUBCELLAR. UGH, THERE'S A MUSTY, NASTY **ODOR** DOWN HERE. AND A SCURRYING NOISE...



SESKKAPPAUGH!!



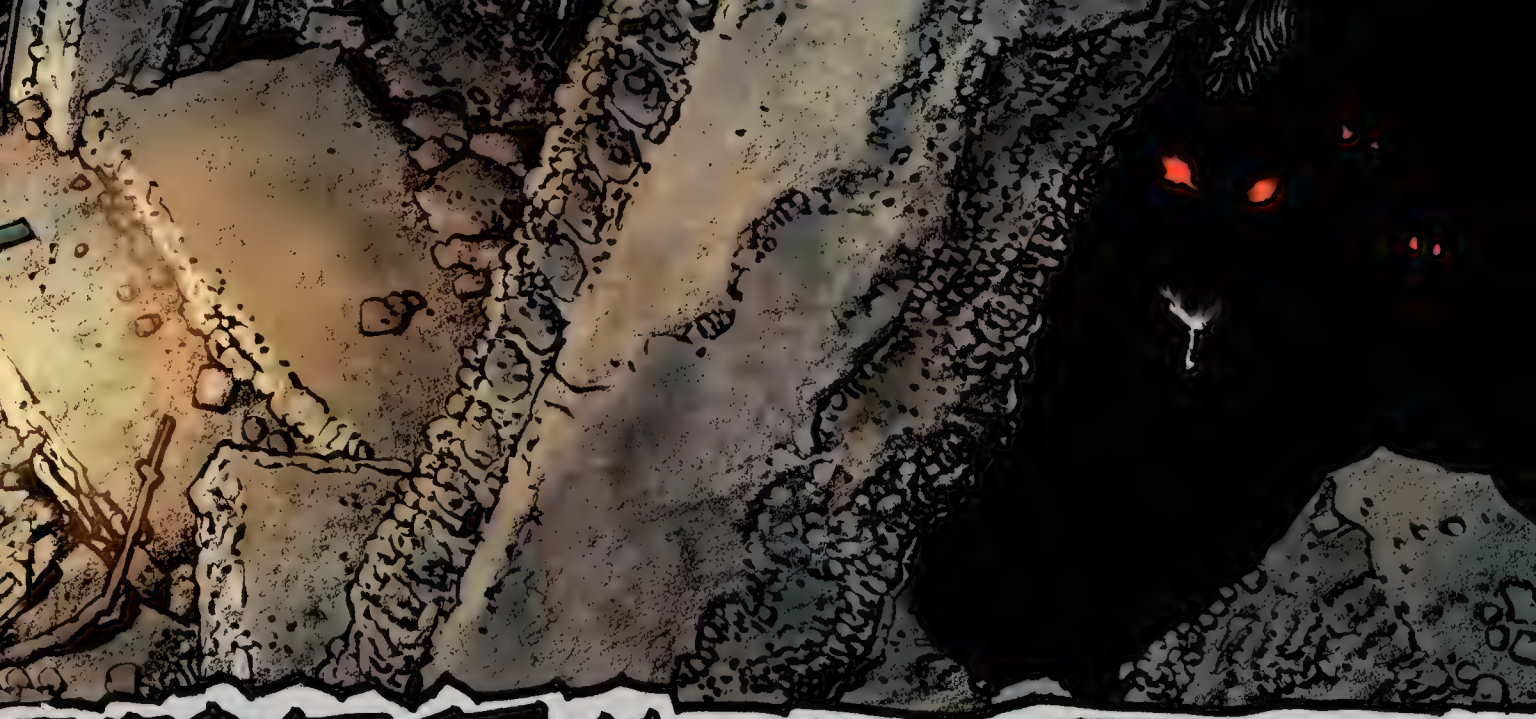
IN THE FLASHLIGHT'S DIM GLOW, SHE SAW MORE **BURNING EYES**.



BLAM!

THE VICIOUS THINGS RUSHED AT HER BEFORE SHE COULD AIM.

SESKKUUURRGH!!



XERA FIRED WILDLY,
BLINDLY, BUT AT
SUCH CLOSE RANGE,
SHE COULDN'T MISS.
THE FOUL CREATURE
FELL DEAD INSTANTLY.



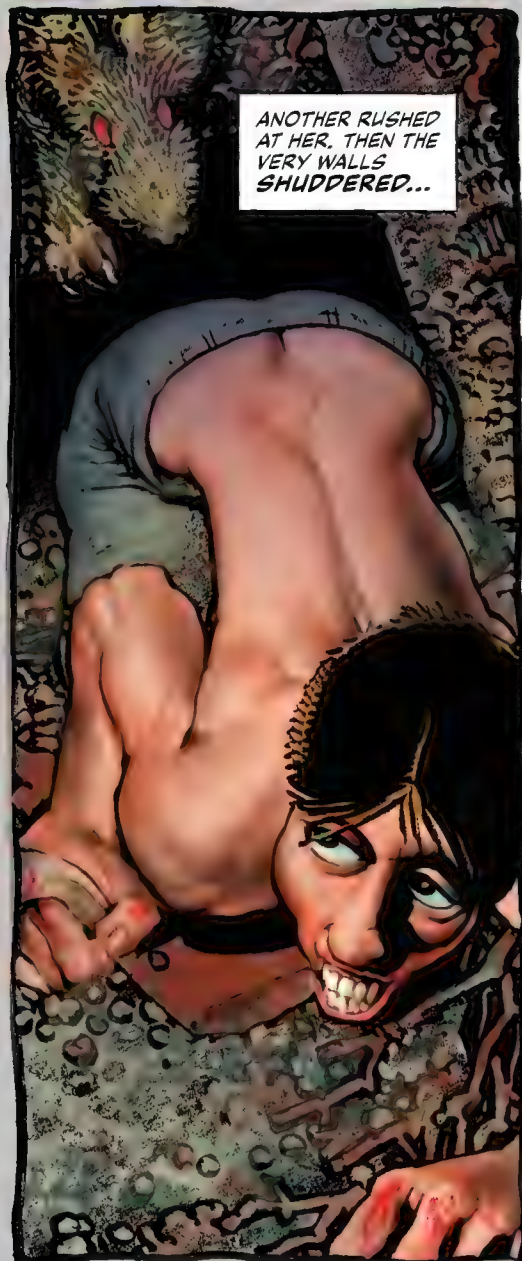
THE RIFLE WAS KNOCKED OUT OF HER
GRASP. SHE **DESPERATELY** SEIZED
A BRICK FRAGMENT IN THE DARK--



--AND **SMASHED** A
RAT'S HEAD, WHILE
ANOTHER TORE AT HER.



XERA SCRAMBLED
THROUGH THE
DEBRIS AND SEIZED
THE RIFLE.



ANOTHER RUSHED
AT HER. THEN THE
VERY WALLS
SHUDDERED...



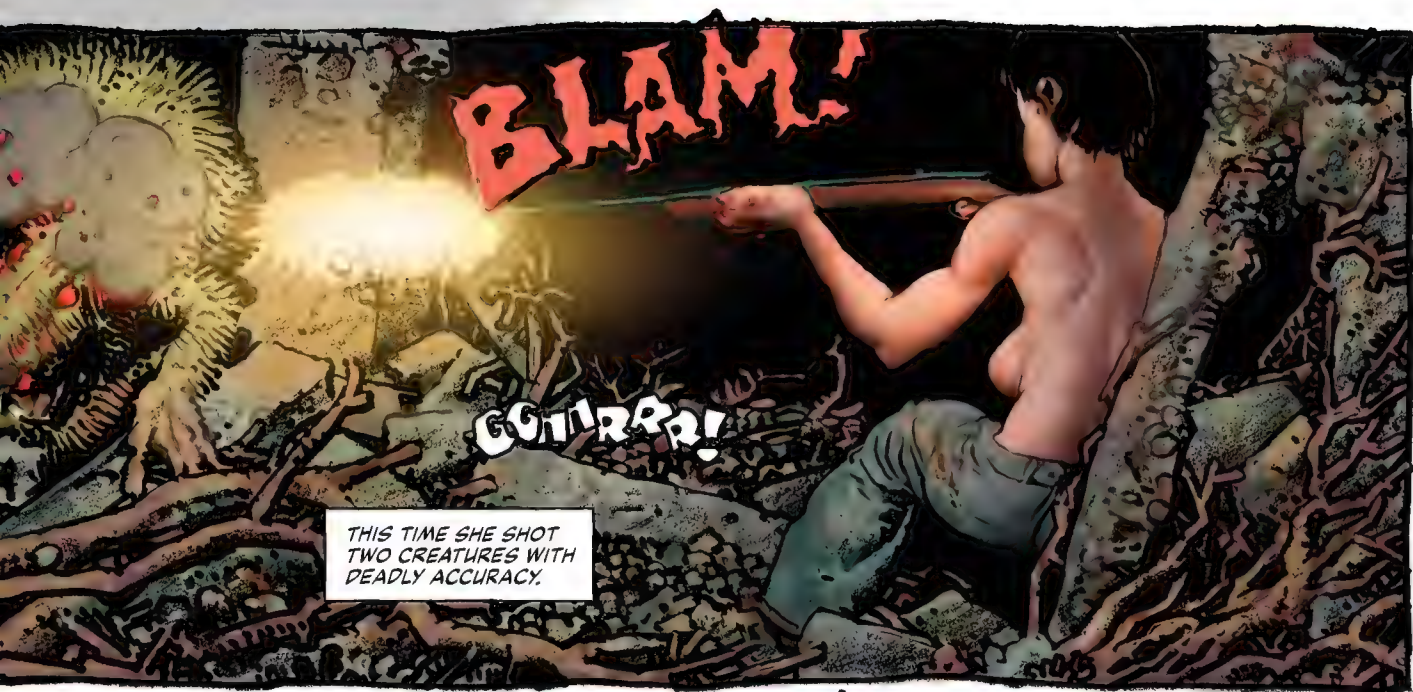
THE EARTHEN CEILING WAS BLOWN
OPEN! THE BRIGHT SKY SHOCKED
THE DARKNESS-LOVING RATS.

A FRIGHTENED RAT TRIED TO
FLEE. XERA PULLED IT BACK.



FIVE BLOODY
CARCASSES
WERE SCATTERED
ABOUT THE PIT.
NONE MOVED.

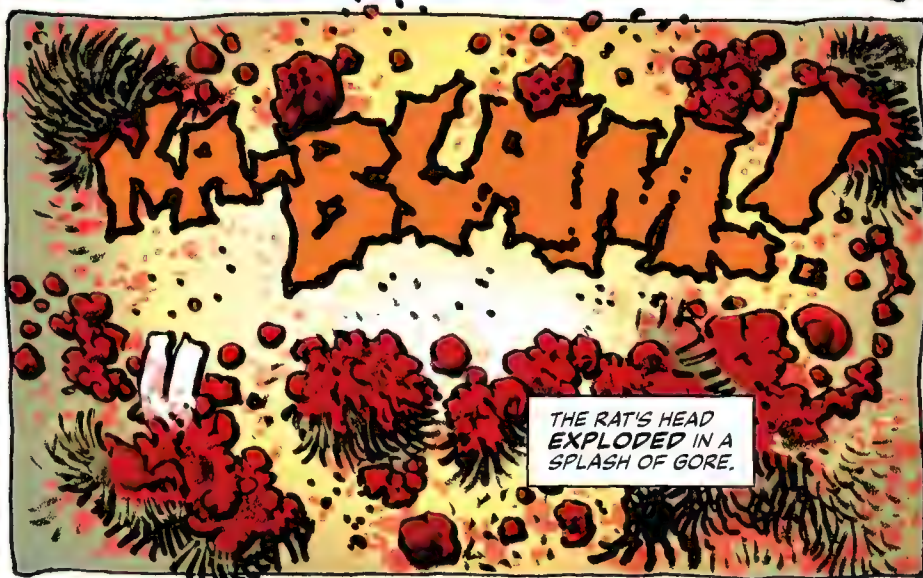




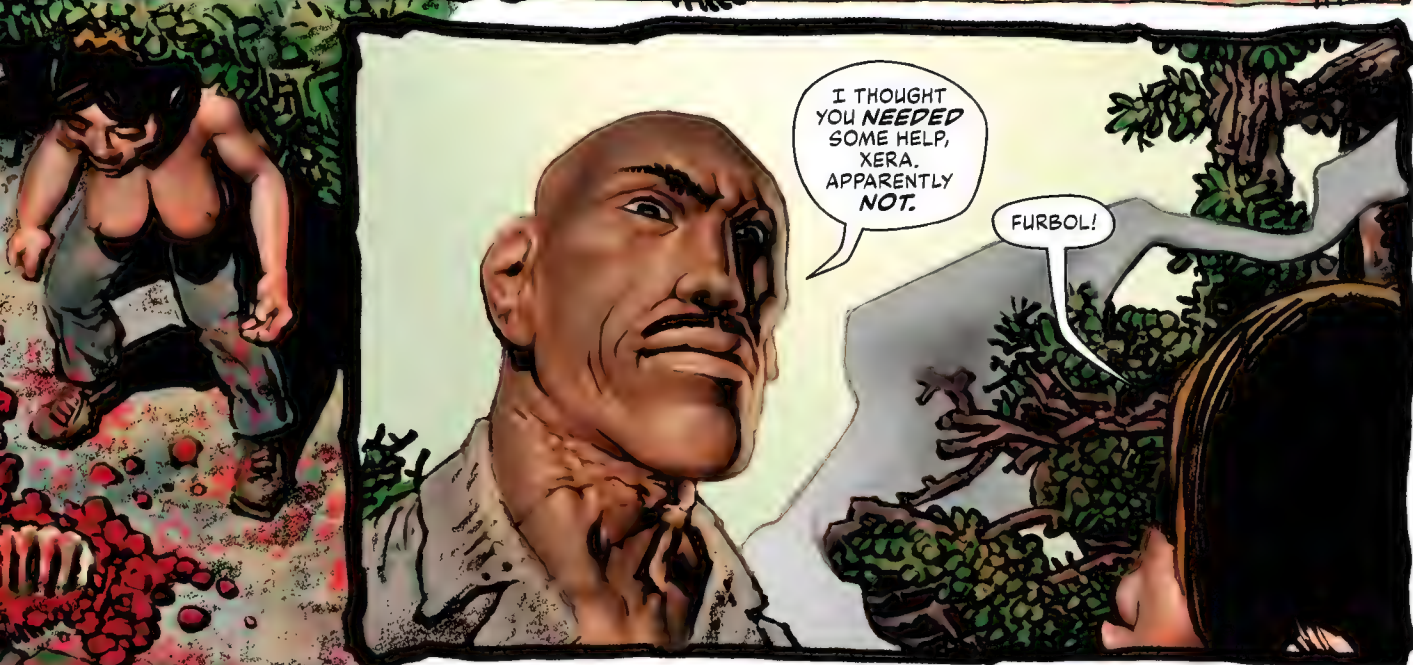
THIS TIME SHE SHOT
TWO CREATURES WITH
DEADLY ACCURACY.



XERA! GET
BACK!



THE RAT'S HEAD
EXPLODED IN A
SPLASH OF GORE.



I THOUGHT
YOU NEEDED
SOME HELP,
XERA.
APPARENTLY
NOT.

FURBOL!

SO, YOUNG
LADY, WHY DID YOU
WANT TO GO INTO
THIS **BLACK**
TUNNEL?

THE LITTLE
GIRL, **KAREN**,
CLIMBED INTO IT.
SHE **WOULDN'T**
COME OUT.

I **FOLLOWED**
HER ALL THE WAY
HERE. **LOOK!** THE
PASSAGE GOES UNDER
THE **HOUSE**.

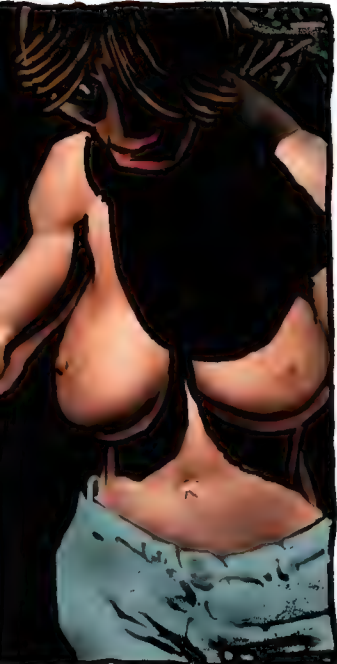
WAIT A
MINUTE,
XERA.

WAIT
FOR **WHAT?**
LET'S GO! WE
SHOULD
HURRY!

HERE! YOU
SHOULD PUT
THIS ON.

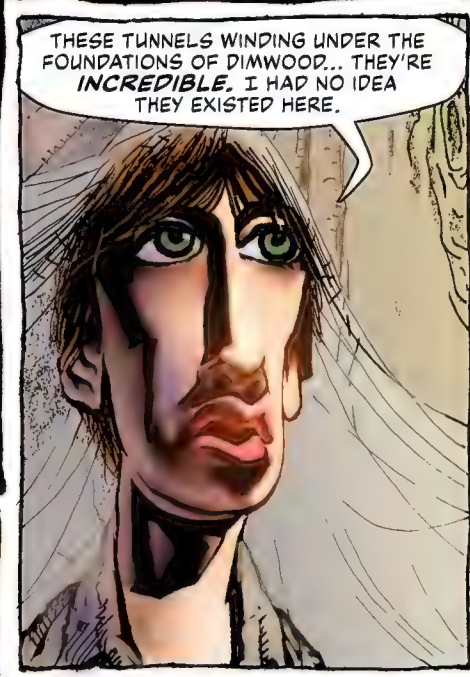
WHAT?

OH--!





XERA AND FURBOL CAREFULLY MADE THEIR WAY THROUGH THE STYGIAN PASSAGES THAT WOUND UNDER THE BROODING MANSION, LOOKING ALL AROUND THEM FOR THE VULNERABLE LITTLE GIRL.



THESE TUNNELS WINDING UNDER THE FOUNDATIONS OF DIMWOOD... THEY'RE INCREDIBLE. I HAD NO IDEA THEY EXISTED HERE.



I'VE WORKED FOR THE DIM FAMILY FOR THIRTY YEARS, AND I DIDN'T KNOW, EITHER.

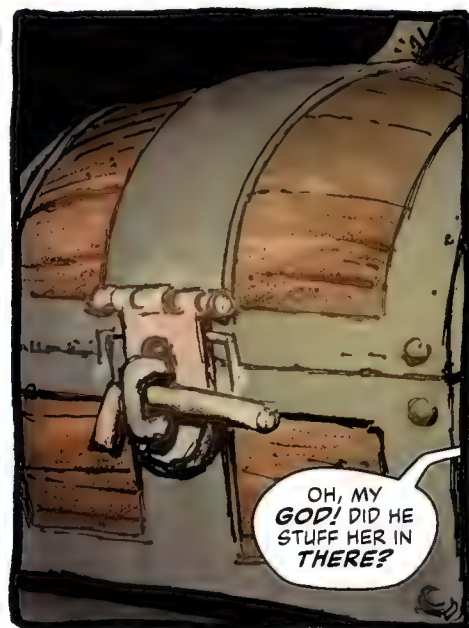
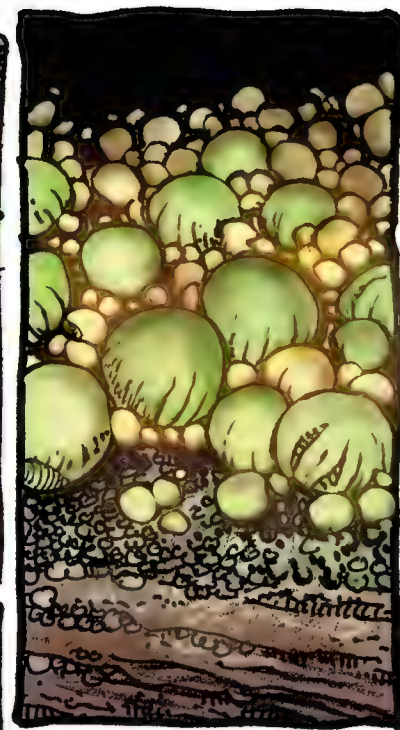


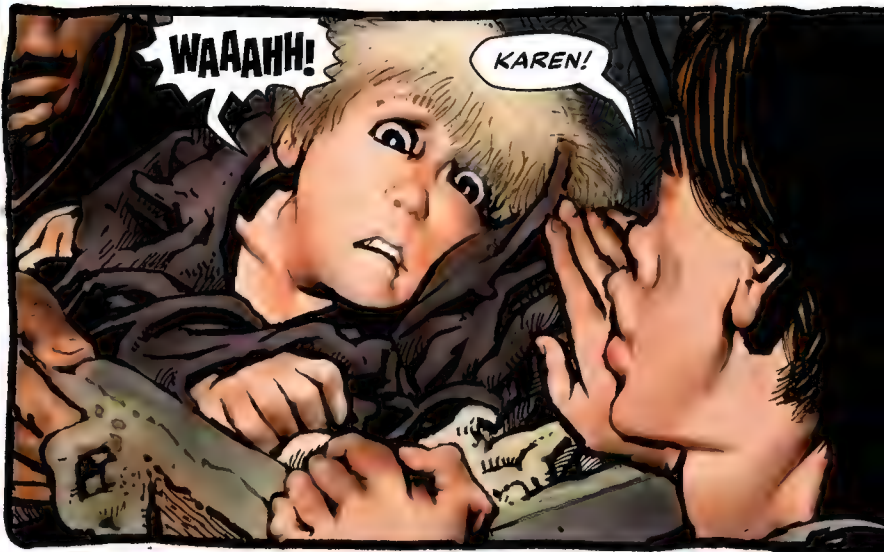
BUT--WHO BUILT IT, AND WHY?

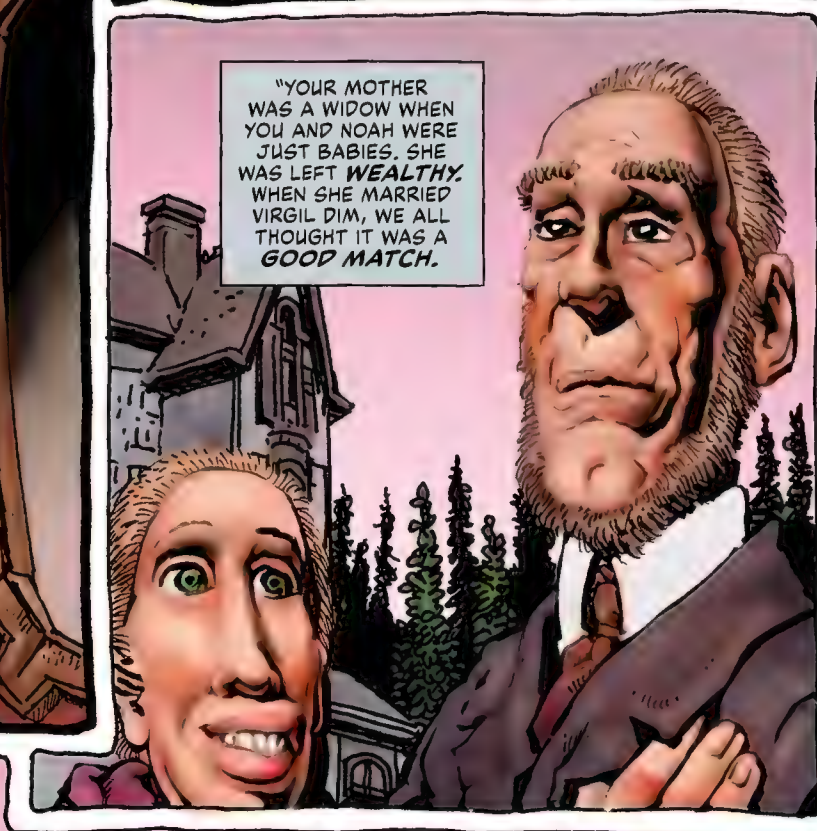
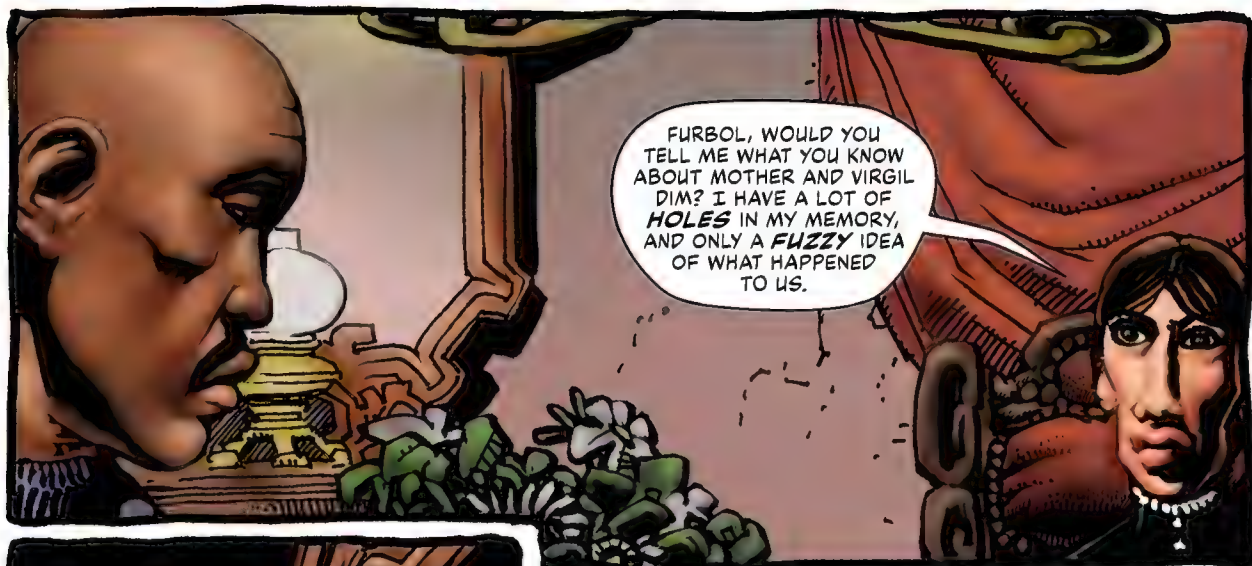
I'M THINKING YOUR STEPFATHER DID. HE WENT COMPLETELY INSANE LONG BEFORE WE REALIZED.



KAREN MUST BE IN HERE SOMEWHERE. I HOPE HE ISN'T, THOUGH.



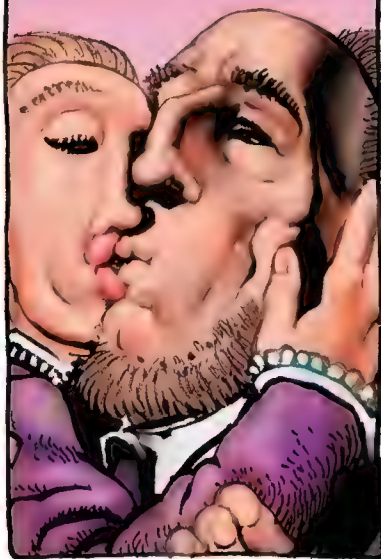




"HE WAS AN
INTELLECTUAL, AND
WAS ESPECIALLY
INTERESTED IN
NATURAL SCIENCE.



"VIRGIL AND MILDRED
WERE DEVOTED TO
EACH OTHER...



"...AND HE WAS
A KIND FATHER.
YOU AND NOAH
LOVED HIM.



"HE CONTINUED
HIS STUDIES--



"--IN BIOLOGY--



"--ESPECIALLY
IN FUNGI AND
MUSHROOMS.





"AS A MYCOLOGIST, HE WAS THRILLED TO DISCOVER AN UNKNOWN SPECIES, WHICH HE DOCUMENTED EXTENSIVELY.



"ONE DAY, HE OBSERVED A FERAL PIG ROOTING IN THE NEW FUNGUS.



"IT SEEMED TO EAGERLY DEVOUR ALL IT COULD FIND.



"THEN IT RAN INTO THE FOREST, CAREENING WILDLY.



"VIRGIL COLLECTED SOME OF THE MUSHROOMS--



"--TO EXPERIMENT WITH EATING SOME HIMSELF.



"AT FIRST, VIRGIL
BECAME ILL.

"THEN HE WAS OVERTAKEN BY A
STRANGE, DISTURBING MOOD.

"HE STARTED JIBBERING,
SLOBBERING, AND
TEARING AT HIS CLOTHES.

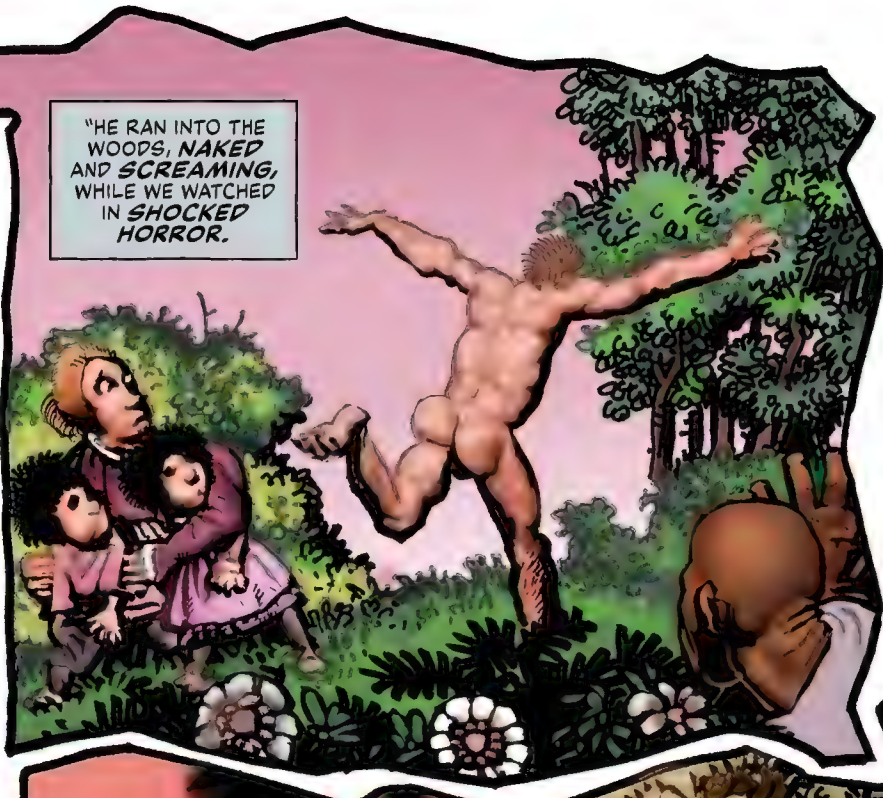
"WE WERE APPALLED TO SEE
THE KIND, INTELLIGENT MAN
WE KNEW REGRESS INTO A
DEPRAVED MANIAC.



"MRS. DIM, IN ANGUISH,
BEGGED ME TO GO AFTER
HER DEMENTED HUSBAND.



"AS I PURSUED HIM, I
SUDDENLY CAME UPON--



"HE RAN INTO THE WOODS, NAKED AND SCREAMING, WHILE WE WATCHED IN SHOCKED HORROR."

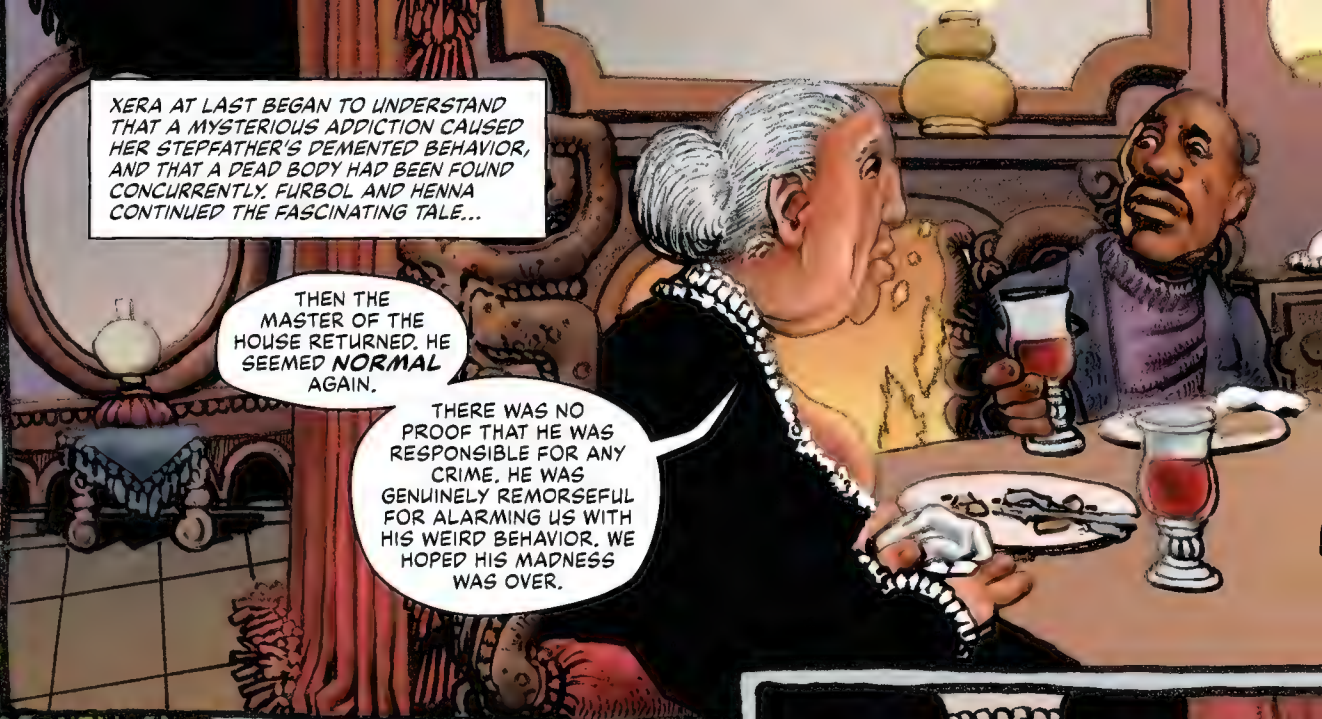


"THE VIOLENT TURMOIL OF HIS MIND MUST HAVE BEEN TORTUOUS..."



"--A BLOODY, DESTROYED BODY."


"I DID NOT KNOW IT WOULD BE THE FIRST OF MANY."



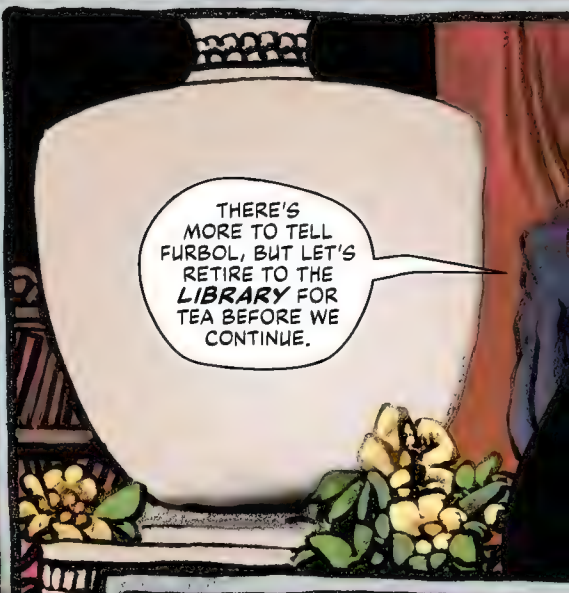
XERA AT LAST BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND THAT A MYSTERIOUS ADDICTION CAUSED HER STEPFATHER'S DEMENTED BEHAVIOR, AND THAT A DEAD BODY HAD BEEN FOUND CONCURRENTLY. FURBOL AND HENNA CONTINUED THE FASCINATING TALE...

THEN THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE RETURNED. HE SEEMED **NORMAL** AGAIN.

THERE WAS NO PROOF THAT HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY CRIME. HE WAS GENUINELY REMORSEFUL FOR ALARMING US WITH HIS WEIRD BEHAVIOR. WE HOPED HIS MADNESS WAS OVER.




MISTRESS MILDRED **INSISTED** ON GIVING HIM THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT. SO WE TOOK UP OUR LIVES AS BEFORE.



THERE'S MORE TO TELL FURBOL, BUT LET'S RETIRE TO THE **LIBRARY** FOR TEA BEFORE WE CONTINUE.



OUTWARDLY, ALL WAS **FINE**. HE RESUMED HIS STUDIES.



"EVERYTHING WAS **GOOD** AGAIN. HE WAS A LOVING FATHER ONCE MORE. HE SPENT MUCH TIME **PLAYING** WITH YOU AND NOAH, AS THOUGH HE WAS TRYING TO REGAIN YOUR TRUST AND LOVE.



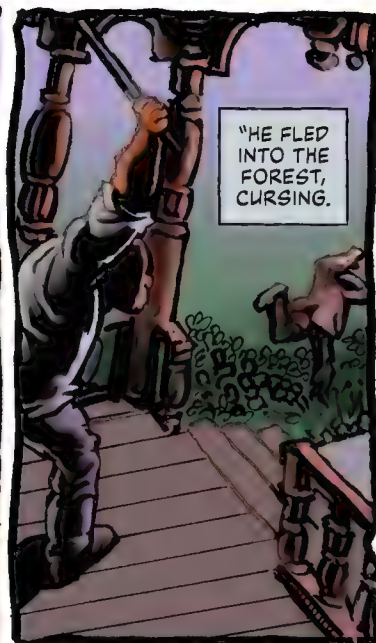




"HE HOWLED IN
DEFIANCE."



"I HIT
HIM WITH
A *PIPE.*"



"HE FLED
INTO THE
FOREST,
CURSING."



"THERE WAS NO SIGN OF HIM FOR A
COUPLE YEARS. YET WE KNEW HE WAS
STILL *PROWLING* THE DENSE WOODS.

"THE REPORTS OF DISAPPEARANCES AND
MYSTERIOUS *DEATHS* WERE *OMINOUS.*"

"THEN ONE EVENING HE *SHAMBLED*
INTO VIEW, *SWEARING* INCOHERENTLY.



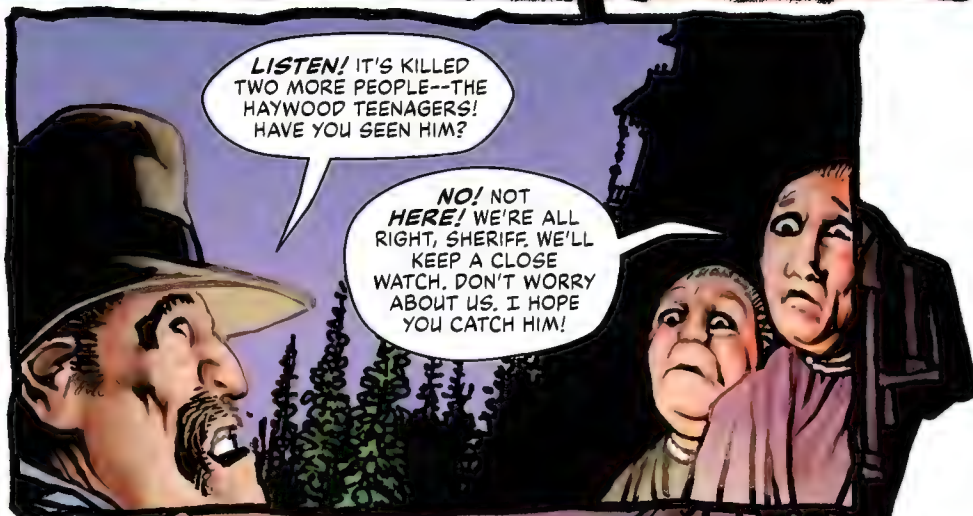
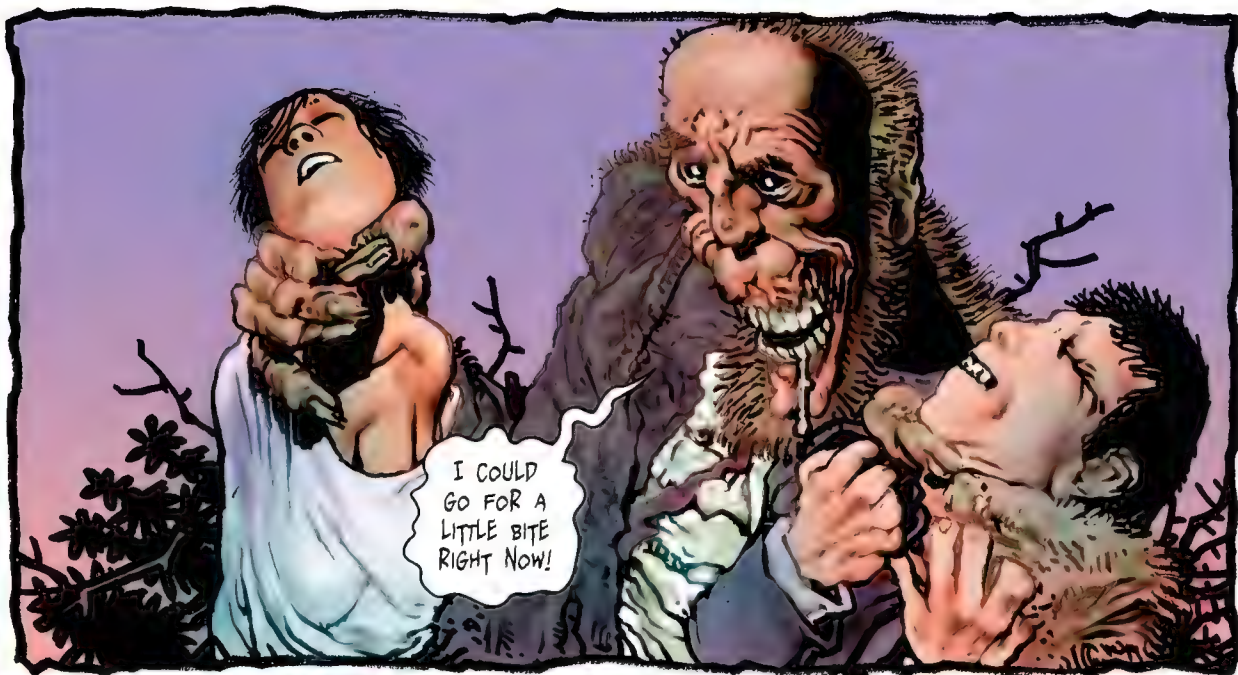
"THE TRANSFORMATION
WAS *HORRIFIC.* MR. DIM
WAS NOW A *MONSTER.*"

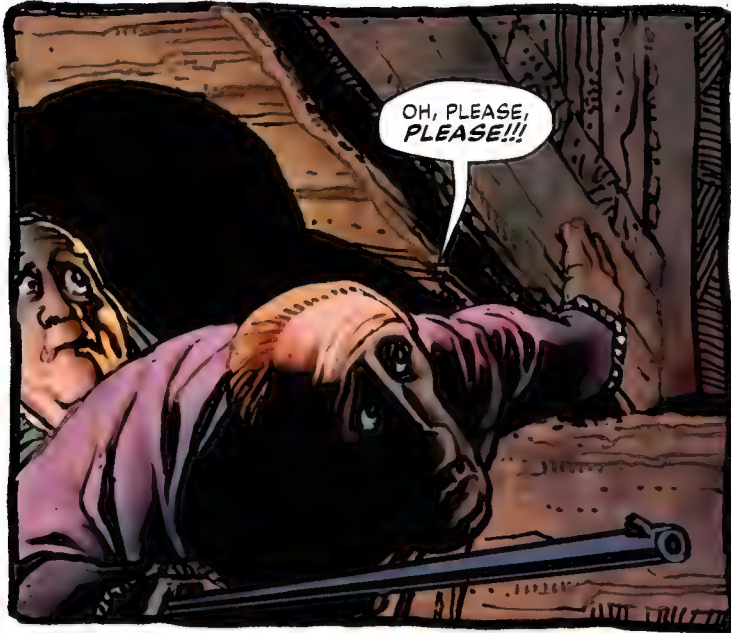



GRAAUGH-G-
G-GH!!

WOMAN, YOU
MUST *HIDE* ME.
THE *SHERIFF* IS
CLOSE BEHIND!









THAT'S WHEN SHE SENT
YOU TO LIVE WITH YOUR
AUNT **ETHEL**. BUT **NOAH**
REFUSED TO GO AND HID. HE
THOUGHT HE HAD TO **STAY**
AND **PROTECT** YOUR
MOTHER.




IT'S ALL
VERY **HARD**
TO TAKE IN AT
ONCE.

IT'S TRUE,
THOUGH. WE
JUST WANTED
TO **PROTECT**
YOU.

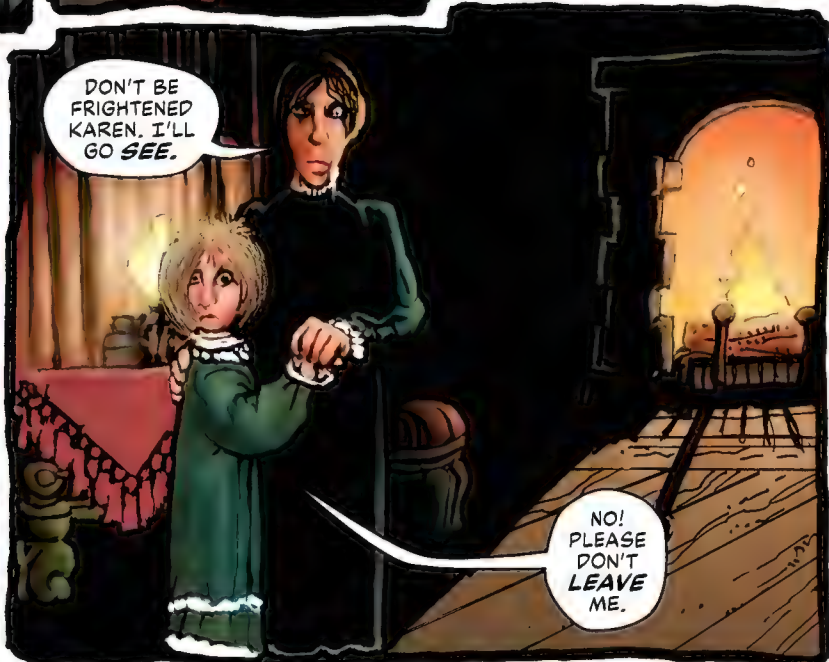
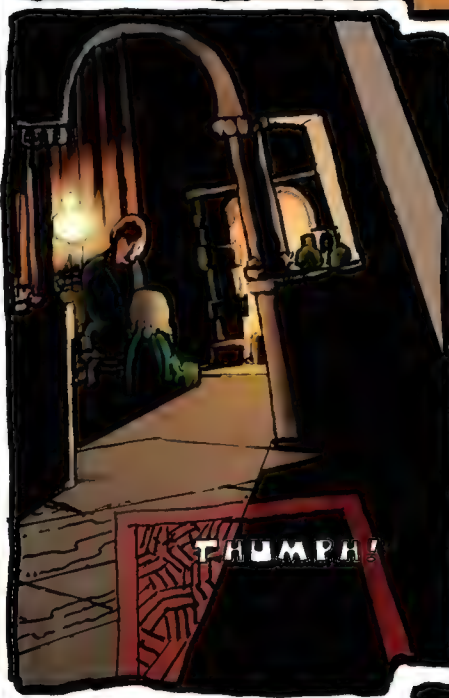


IT'S GETTING
LATE, DEAR. WON'T
YOU **RECONSIDER**,
AND COME WITH US?



YOU TWO ARE
BOTH DEARS. BUT
SINCE **FURBOL SEALED**
OFF THE PASSAGE FROM
THE TUNNEL TO THE
HOUSE, I KNOW
WE'RE **SAFE**
HERE. AND
WE'RE **NOT**
AFRAID.





THE DARK, CAVERNOUS HOUSE AND OBSCURING WOODS SEEMED INCREASINGLY **SINISTER** AS BLACK SHADOWS CRAWLED UP THE ANCIENT WALLS.



OKAY.
STAY
BEHIND
ME.

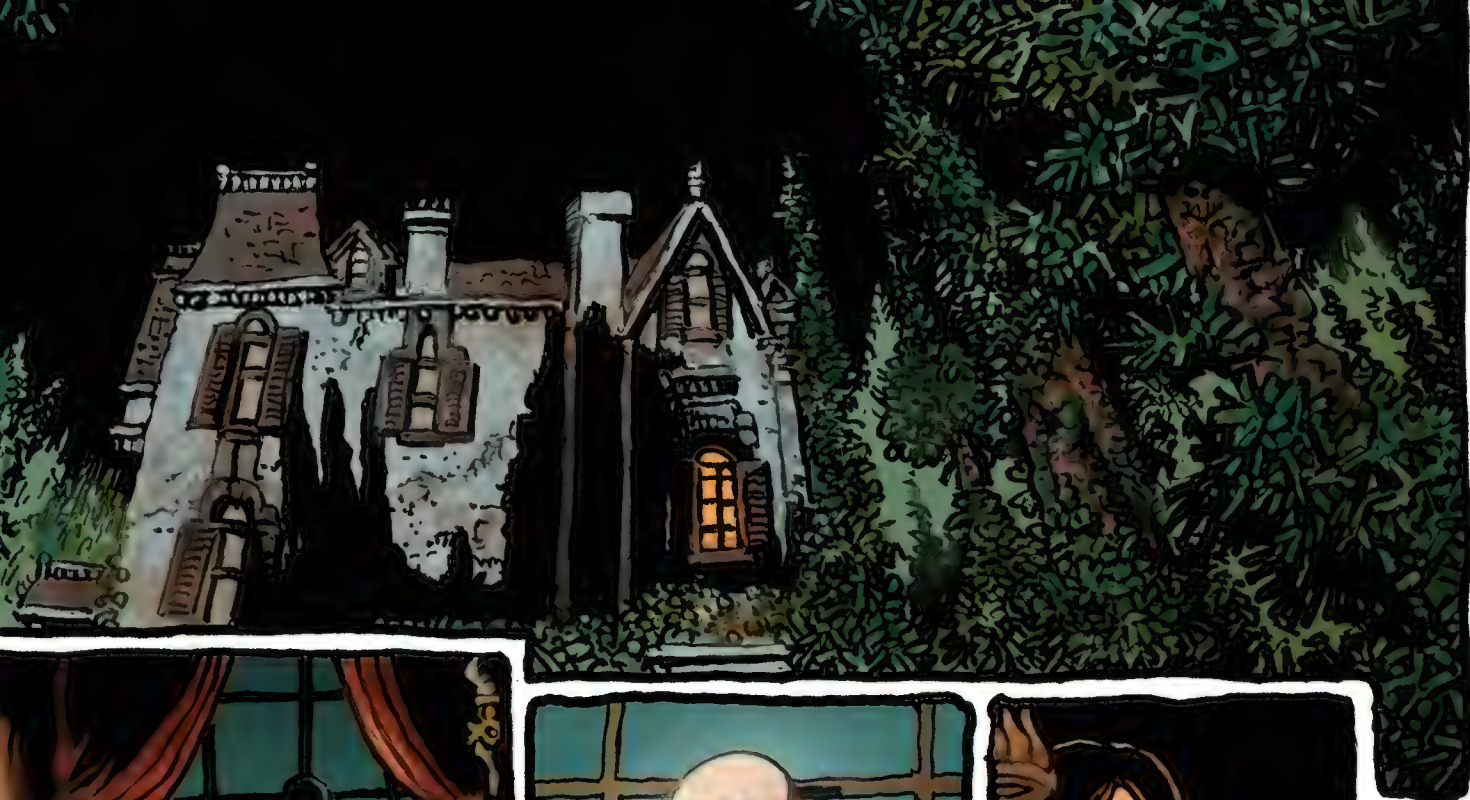


A GROWLING
RUMBLE
PREAMBLED A
TEMPESTUOUS
NIGHT.



OH, IT'S
JUST AN **URN**
ON A TALL
CABINET.

THUMP



*-K-K-RAK-B-BOOM



WAH!



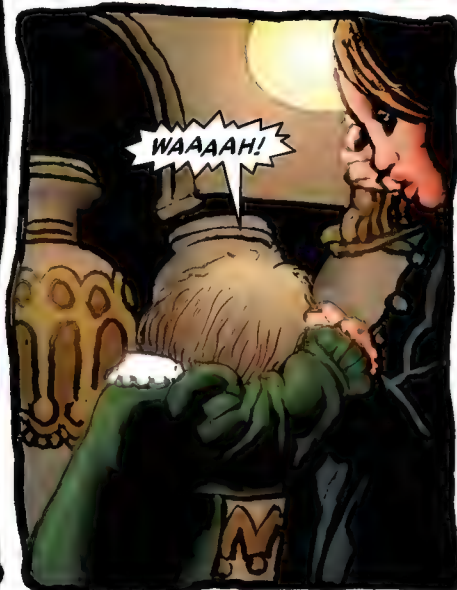
THERE'S
THAT SOUND
AGAIN.

IT CAME
FROM THIS
WAY.



THUNDER!

NO.
THIS
WAY.



WAAAAH!



C-C-C-GREEAK!!!





4 - 5 - 5 - 5 - X - X - E - E - R R A A -





YOU MUST
LEAVE!



IT
SEARCHES
FOR YOU -
YOU
ABOVE ALL
OTHERS.



LISTEN TO
ME, XERA.
YOUR LIFE
DEPENDS ON
IT!




BUT WHAT--?
WHAT SEARCHES FOR
ME, MOTHER?



IT IS VERY
NEAR.




IT
GRABES
YOUR
FLESH!



PLEASE, MOTHER.
TELL ME HOW YOU **DIED**.
DID THAT MONSTER--


YES, XERA. I WILL
TELL YOU, SO YOU WILL
UNDERSTAND, AND
LEAVE DIMWOOD FOREVER,
AS I BID YOU. I WANT
YOU TO BE **SAFE**.




THE THING THAT WAS
ONCE MY HUSBAND **KILLED**
MANY PEOPLE. HE **LURKED**
FREELY IN DIMWOOD FOREST,
ELUDING ALL EFFORTS TO
FIND HIM.

I FELT
I MUST DO
WHAT OTHERS
HAD **FAILED**
TO DO.

IT IS A TALE
OF **HATRED** AND
REVENGE.



"I HEARD THE
FIEND SNEAKING
NEAR THE HOUSE,
SO I TOOK THE
REMAINING **RIFLE**
AND SET OUT IN
THE SNOW.



"SOON I CAUGHT
SIGHT OF HIM.
HE LED ME ON.



"IT WAS DEEP WINTER. FURBOL HAD JOINED A POSSE, BUT THEY WERE LOOKING TOO FAR NORTH.



"A RECENT SNOWFALL MADE IT *EASY* TO FOLLOW HIM-- PERHAPS HE WAS *LURING* ME. HE IS *CUNNING*.



"I FIRED, BUT I WAS TOO FAR AWAY FOR A GOOD SHOT."



DIE, YOU EVIL BASTARD!



"I MISSED. HE WAS GONE."



"HE SUDDENLY
APPEARED."



"I FIRED--AND
THIS TIME HE
STAGGERED."



OOARGH!



GOD DAMN YOU,
YOU CRAZY BITCH. YOU'LL
PAY FOR THAT!



GLIK
KLAK



"I PRESSED
MY ADVANTAGE,
AND TOOK
ANOTHER
SHOT."

POW



MILDRED,
YOU'VE KILLED
ME!



"I *THOUGHT*
HE WAS DONE
FOR. I SAW HIM
BLEEDING."



BURN IN
HELL!



"ANGER AND DETERMINATION
MADE ME *CARELESS* WHEN
I APPROACHED HIM."





"THE BEAST
WAS ON ME,
AND THE
RIFLE WAS
GONE."



"HE *BIT* ME
VICIOUSLY."



"NOW I WAS
HELPLESS."



HEH, HEH,
HEH! THIS'LL
COOL YOU
OFF!



KRAK!

"THEN HE WANTED
TO **TORMENT**
ME FOR HIS OWN
ENJOYMENT."

COME ON
UP FOR AIR,
DEAR!



WHICH
WILL IT BE THAT
KILLS YOU--THE
FREEZING COLD
OR DROWNING?

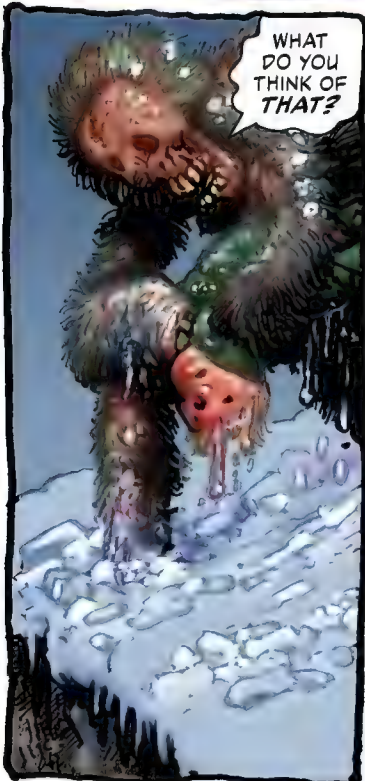




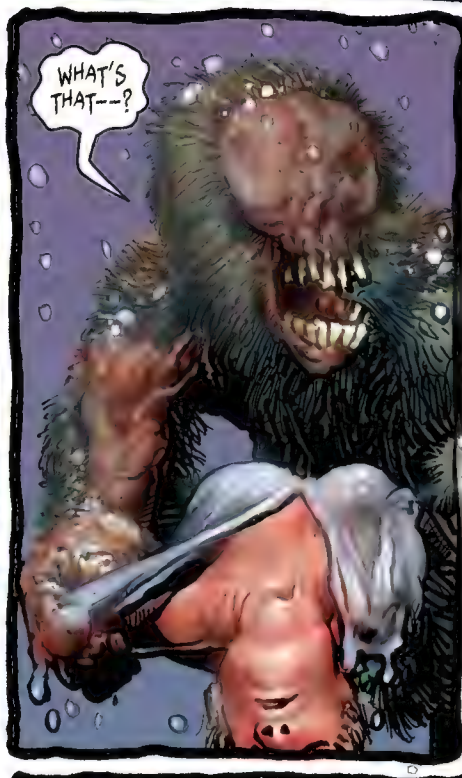
ARE YOU **DEAD**
YET? I WANT TO TELL
YOU SOMETHING.

I'M GOING TO **EAT**
YOU, AND THEN I'M GOING
TO EAT YOUR **CHILDREN**,
ONE BY ONE.

DON'T WORRY.
XERA WON'T GET LEFT
OUT. SHE'LL COME BACK,
AND I WILL GET
HER, TOO.



WHAT
DO YOU
THINK OF
THAT?



WHAT'S
THAT--?



THAT
GODDAMNED
FURBOL!



"FURBOL IS THE ONLY
ONE WHO COULD
HAVE FINISHED HIM,
BUT IT STARTED
SNOWING AGAIN."

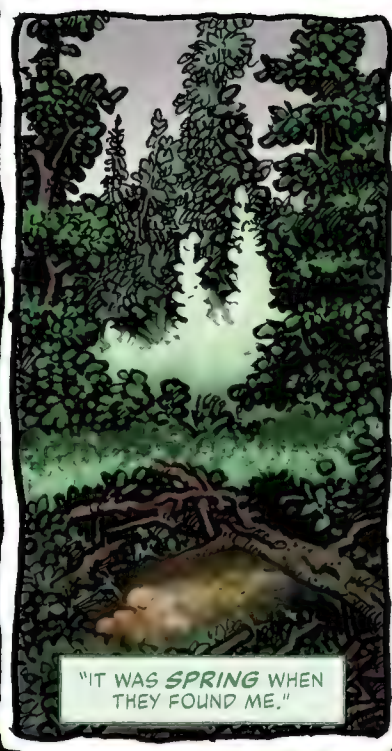


MRS. DIM MUST HAVE FOLLOWED HIM.



I'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO PICK UP HIS TRAIL, NOW.

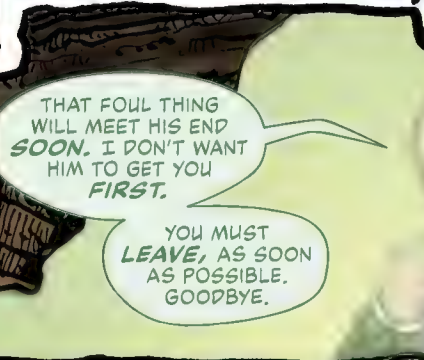
"THE BEAST HID MY BODY IN A SNOW-COVERED THICKET AND FLED.



"IT WAS *SPRING* WHEN THEY FOUND ME."

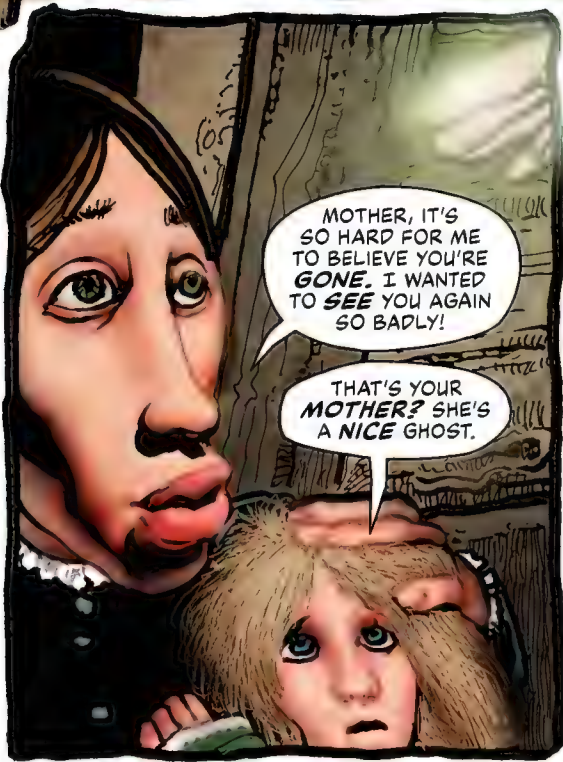


OH, MOTHER--



THAT FOUL THING WILL MEET HIS END SOON. I DON'T WANT HIM TO GET YOU FIRST.

YOU MUST LEAVE, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. GOODBYE.



MOTHER, IT'S SO HARD FOR ME TO BELIEVE YOU'RE GONE. I WANTED TO SEE YOU AGAIN SO BADLY!

THAT'S YOUR MOTHER? SHE'S A NICE GHOST.



YES, KAREN. I THINK SHE'S RIGHT. YOU AND I SHOULD LEAVE TOMORROW. HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO LIVE WITH ME FOR A WHILE?

ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT, GUTTURAL GROWLS OF THUNDER PROMISED A POWERFUL RAINSTORM--BUT THE PROMISE WAS BROKEN AND NO RAIN CAME.

IN THE MORNING, A HOT, DRY, WOLFISH WIND BEGAN BLOWING, AND IT ROSE AND FELL IN DEMONIC ULLULATION, TOSSING THE TREE BRANCHES.

TITUS RUCKMAN MUTTERED **NERVOUSLY** TO HIMSELF AS HE DROVE TO HIS APPOINTMENT WITH YOUNG XERA DIM AT THE DIMWOOD MANSION--THE MYSTERIOUS **EPICENTER** OF UNSPEAKABLY GRISLY DEATHS AND WEIRD DISAPPEARANCES IN THE DEPTHS OF THE VAST FOREST.

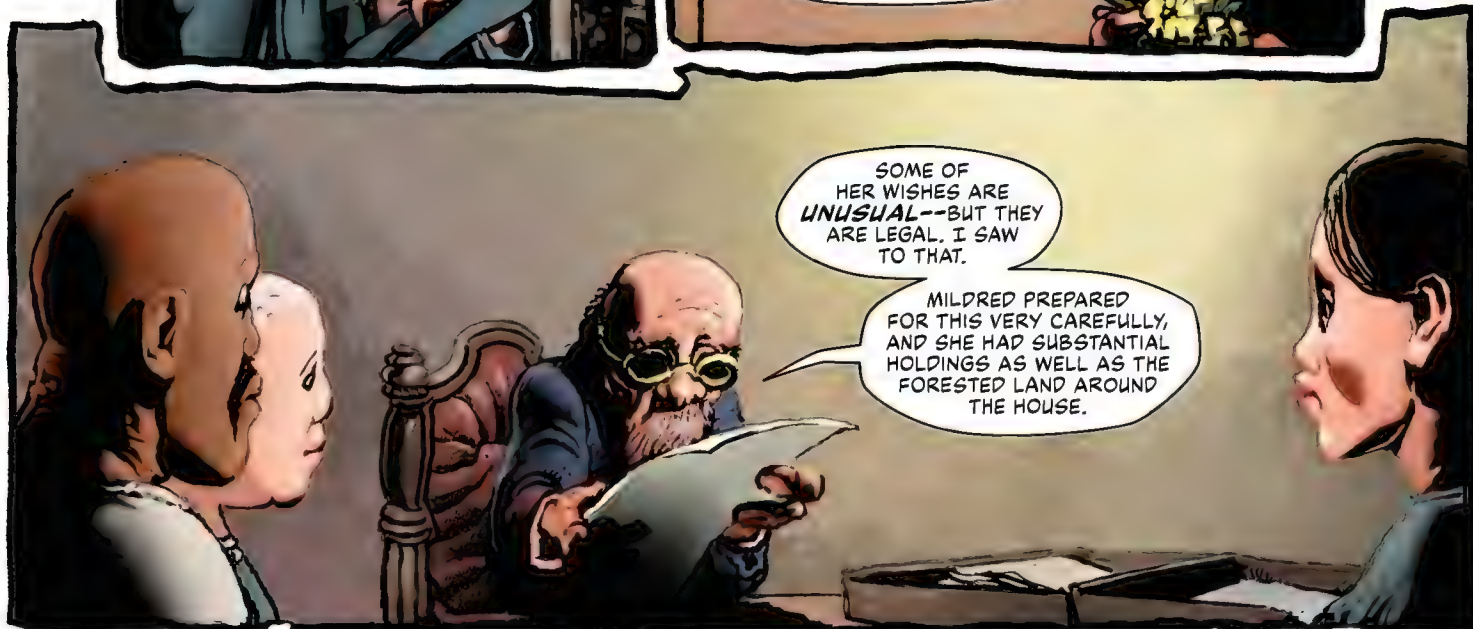
OH, WHY COULDN'T WE DO THIS BUSINESS AT MY OFFICE IN TOWN? IT WOULD BE MUCH MORE CONVENIENT.

FINALLY, HE ARRIVED AT THE GREAT HOUSE WHICH **CROUCHED**, WAITING, AMIDST DENSELY MASSED, UNDULATING FOLIAGE.

I WORE THESE WHEN I WAS YOUR AGE. WE'LL GET SOME NEW THINGS FOR YOU, LATER.

OH, THANK YOU, MISS DIM. THEY'RE NICER THAN ANY I HAD BEFORE.

WE'LL LEAVE SOON, AND I THINK YOU WILL LIKE IT WHERE WE'RE GOING. NOTHING TO FRIGHTEN YOU.





THERE IS A **GENEROUS** TRUST FUND FOR YOU, XERA.



THE TRUST ALSO PROVIDES FOR HER FAITHFUL STAFF, HENNA RAWP AND FURBOL MOSER. YOU WILL RECEIVE A MONTHLY PAYMENT FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIVES.



I DARE SAY YOU WILL BE ABLE TO **RETIRE** AT THIS POINT, IF YOU WISH.



XERA, ONE OF YOUR MOTHER'S MOST EMPHATIC WISHES IS THAT YOU **LEAVE** DIMWOOD FOREVER AND SETTLE ELSEWHERE.



OF COURSE, THIS IS UNENFORCEABLE, BUT SHE HAS MADE IT MOST ADVANTAGEOUS.



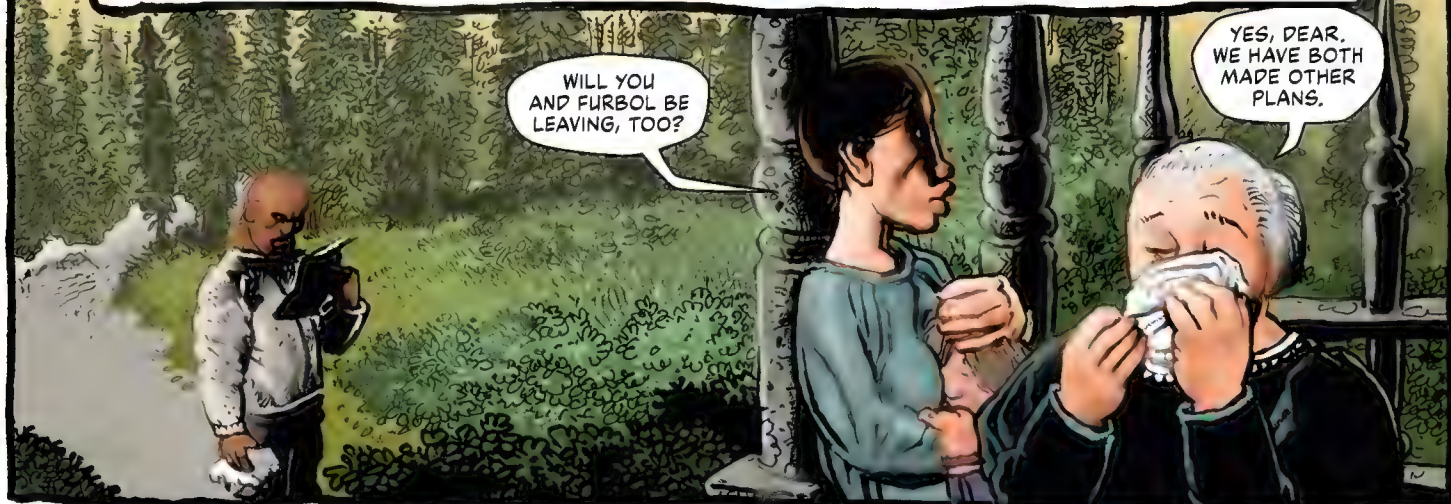
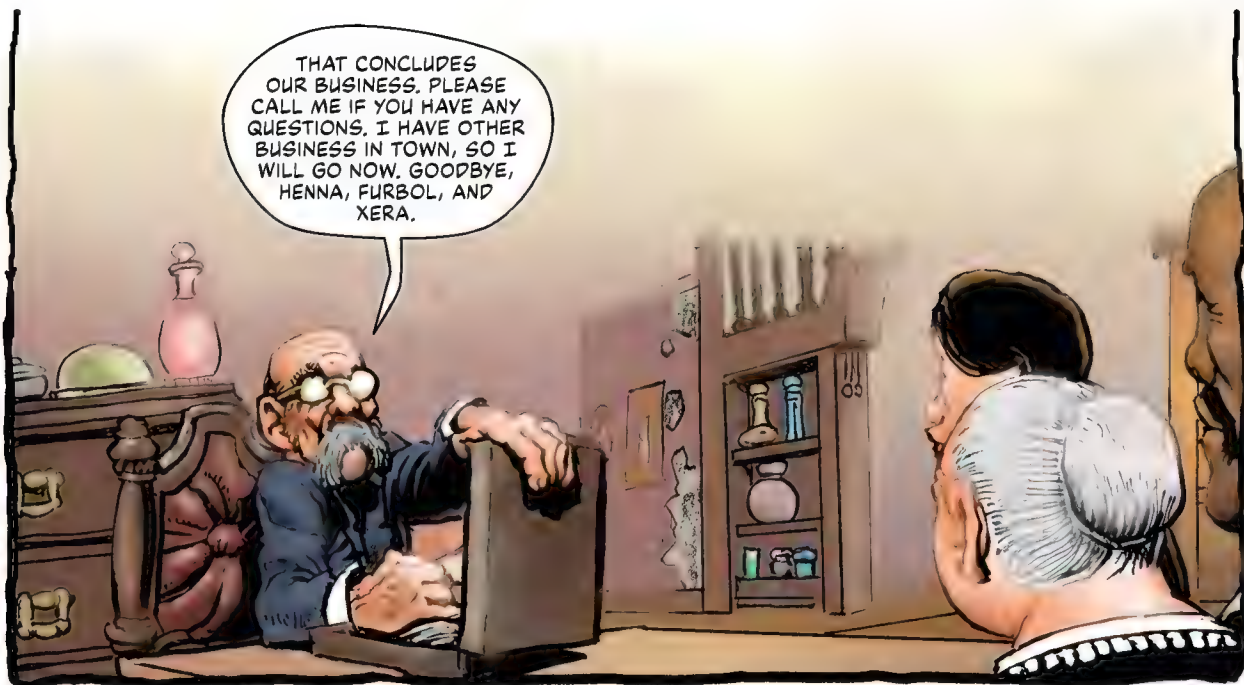
MILDRED ALSO PUT ASIDE SOME FAMILY **HEIRLOOMS** AND KEEPSAKES FOR YOU, XERA.



YOU'LL FIND THEM PACKED IN A TRUNK IN AN UPSTAIRS ROOM.

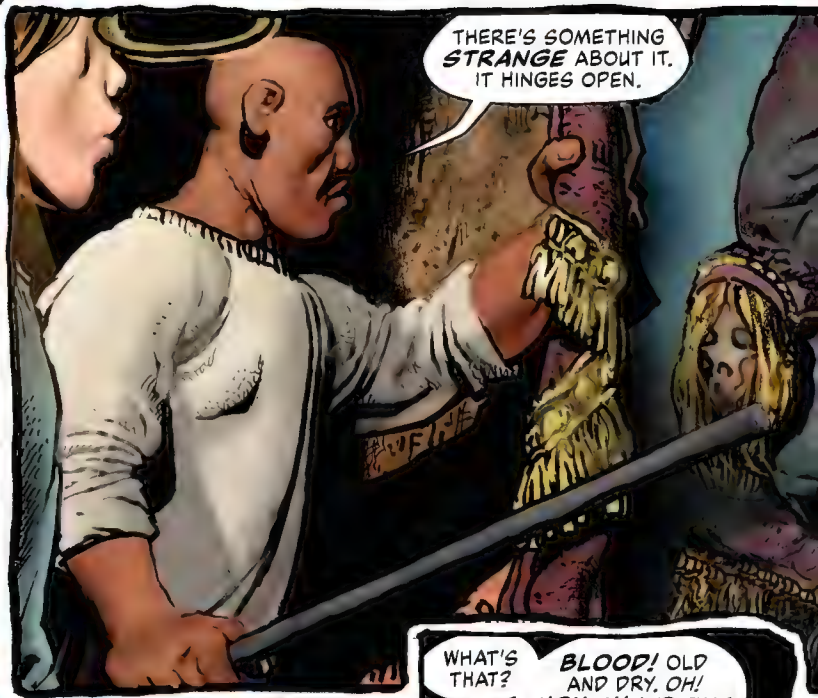


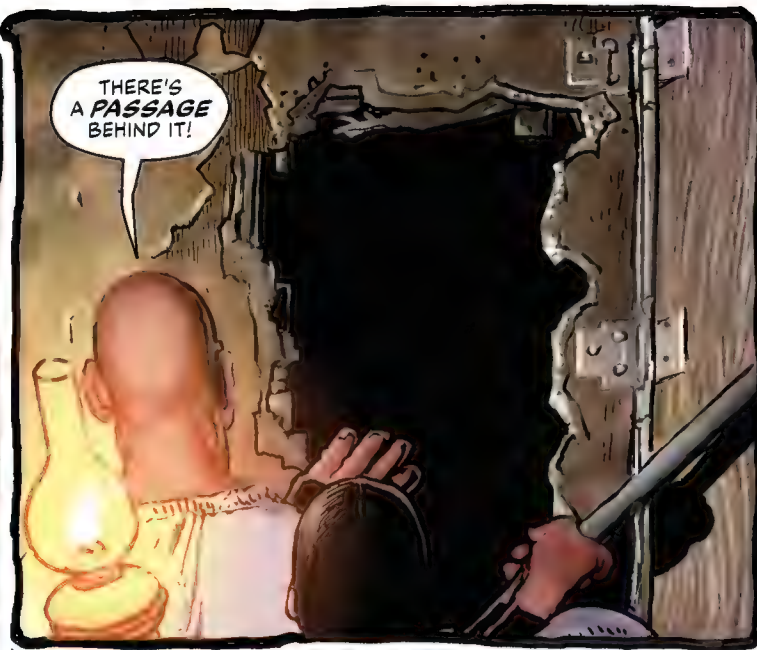
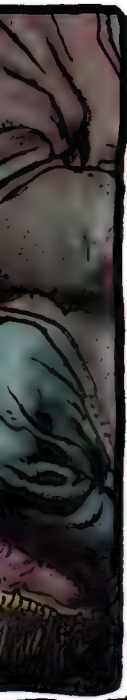
OH, YES. THERE WERE SOME **BEAUTIFUL** CAMEOS OF MOTHER, NOAH, AND I.











THERE'S
A **PASSAGE**
BEHIND IT!



YOU
SHOULD
GO BACK.



NO! I
HAVE TO
SEE--



OH!



XERA AND FURBOL STOOD FROZEN IN SHOCK, A HORRIFIC TABLEAU SPREAD BEFORE THEM-- THE GRISLY REMAINS OF SCORES OF MURDERED AND CANNIBALIZED HUMANS, CACHED IN THIS HIDDEN ATTIC CHAMBER.



SLOWLY, XERA REALIZED THAT ONE FACE HAD FEATURES SHE RECOGNIZED.



IS IT--IS IT MOTHER?



XERA, HONEY, STAY BACK.



YES, XERA; IT IS YOUR MOTHER.

OH, GOD! BUT WHY IS SHE HERE?

VIRGIL HAS BEEN ACTIVE, PROWLING AROUND. AND WE KNOW HIS TUNNELS UNDER THE HOUSE AND CEMETERY. I WONDER IF HE WANTED TO GET HER UP HERE SO HE COULD-- GLOAT OVER HER SOME MORE.



OH, NO!
THAT FIGURE
CHAINED TO
THE WALL--
COULD THAT
BE--NOAH?

COME BACK
DOWNSTAIRS,
XERA.

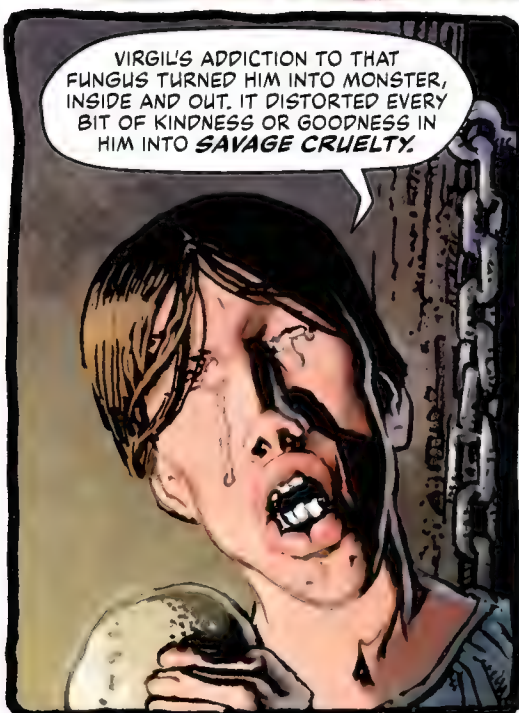


WAIT!



NOAH! OH,
NOAH. SO, THIS IS
WHAT HAPPENED
TO YOU.

WE
THOUGHT HE
MIGHT BE DEAD,
BUT WE NEVER
THOUGHT--
ANYTHING
LIKE *THIS*.



VIRGIL'S ADDICTION TO THAT
FUNGUS TURNED HIM INTO MONSTER,
INSIDE AND OUT. IT DISTORTED EVERY
BIT OF KINDNESS OR GOODNESS IN
HIM INTO *SAVAGE CRUELTY*.



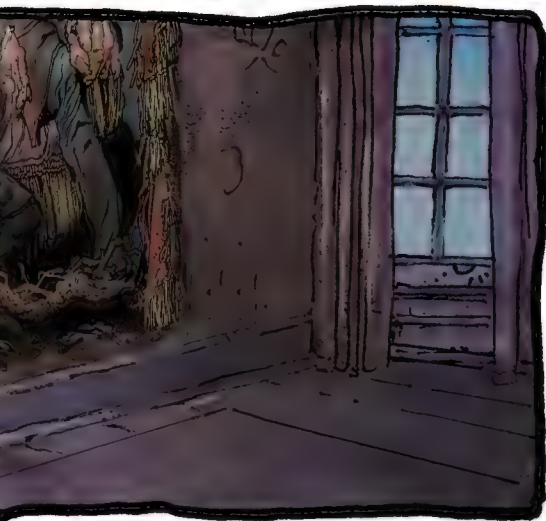
AND
UNNATURAL
HUNGERS.













XERA, THE LETTER THAT TITUS RUCKMAN HANDED ME WAS FROM YOUR MOTHER. SHE WANTED ME TO KILL VIRGIL, SO THAT YOU WILL BE **SAFE**--

--SO THAT EVERYONE WILL BE SAFE AND THERE WILL BE **NO MORE MURDERS**.



IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE IT'S **OVER**.



OKAY, KAREN, WE'RE **READY**. IT'S TIME TO GO.



DEAR, IT'S BEEN SO **GOOD** TO SEE YOU AGAIN!



HENNA, PLEASE WRITE TO ME! I'D **LOVE** TO HEAR FROM YOU.



I **PROMISE**, XERA. YOU, TOO!

OH, I WILL **MISS** HER.

FURBOL, ARE YOU **READY**?

ALMOST.

I STILL HAVE **ONE MORE THING** TO DO.

AT LAST, XERA AND KAREN WERE DEPARTING
THIS PLACE OF HORROR AND FEAR.

THEIR **TENSE** ANXIETY DISSIPATED; THEY
HAD EACH OTHER FOR COMPANY AND WERE
LOOKING FORWARD TO A **SAFE** HAVEN.

WE'LL STAY WITH A
GOOD FRIEND OF MINE
WHO LIVES OUT-OF-STATE
UNTIL WE FIND OUR OWN
PLACE. SHE LIVES BY THE
OCEAN. I THINK YOU'LL
LIKE IT THERE.

FURBOL AND HENNA
WERE ALSO ABOUT
TO LEAVE, BUT FURBOL
HAD **ONE MORE**
TASK TO COMPLETE.

IN MRS. DIM'S
LETTER, SHE ASKED
ME TO FULFILL **TWO**
FINAL REQUESTS. THE
FIRST WAS TO
KILL VIRGIL.

THE
SECOND IS
TO SET **FIRE**
TO DIMWOOD
MANSION AND
BURN
IT TO THE
GROUND...

"VIRGIL'S
MADNESS
ENDS HERE..."

AAAGHHH!

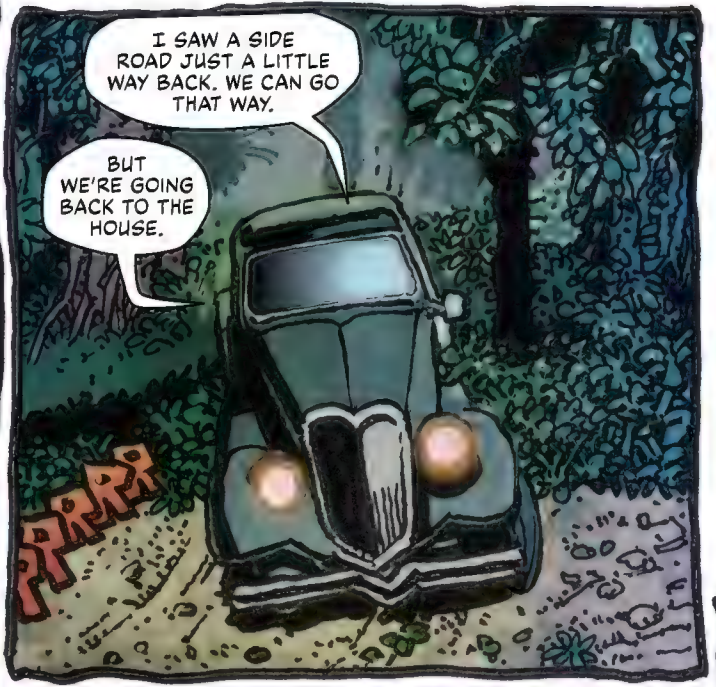
SCREECH!

HENNA SAID THERE'VE
BEEN A **LOT** OF DEAD TREES
FALLING DOWN THIS YEAR. I'M
SURE THAT'S ALL THIS IS.



I SAW A SIDE
ROAD JUST A LITTLE
WAY BACK. WE CAN GO
THAT WAY.

BUT
WE'RE GOING
BACK TO THE
HOUSE.



FURBOL
HASN'T LEFT
THE HOUSE YET.
WE'LL FIND HIM
AND ASK FOR
DIRECTIONS.



OH, MY
GOD!

SCREECH

THE HOUSE WAS
BEING **DEVoured**
BY A **RAGING**
CONFLAGRATION,
THE **INTENSE** HEAT
RADIATING OUT INTO
THE VERDANT,
CLAUSTROPHOBIC
SURROUNDINGS, AND
A TOWER OF DARK,
CHOKING SMOKE
RISING HIGH ABOVE.

FURBOL???

KAREN!
HONEY, WAIT,
WE'LL LOOK
TOGETHER.

WHERE'S
FURBOL?

GNA-AAGH-
GHHHH!!

GNAGH-HA-HA-HA!
GOTCHA, XERA! I'M
GOING TO KILL YOU AND
EAT YOU...AND THE
LITTLE GIRL FOR A
TASTY DESSERT--OR
PERHAPS I'LL SAVE HER
FOR A SNACK.

KAREN,
RUN AWAY!



WUUUAARGH!



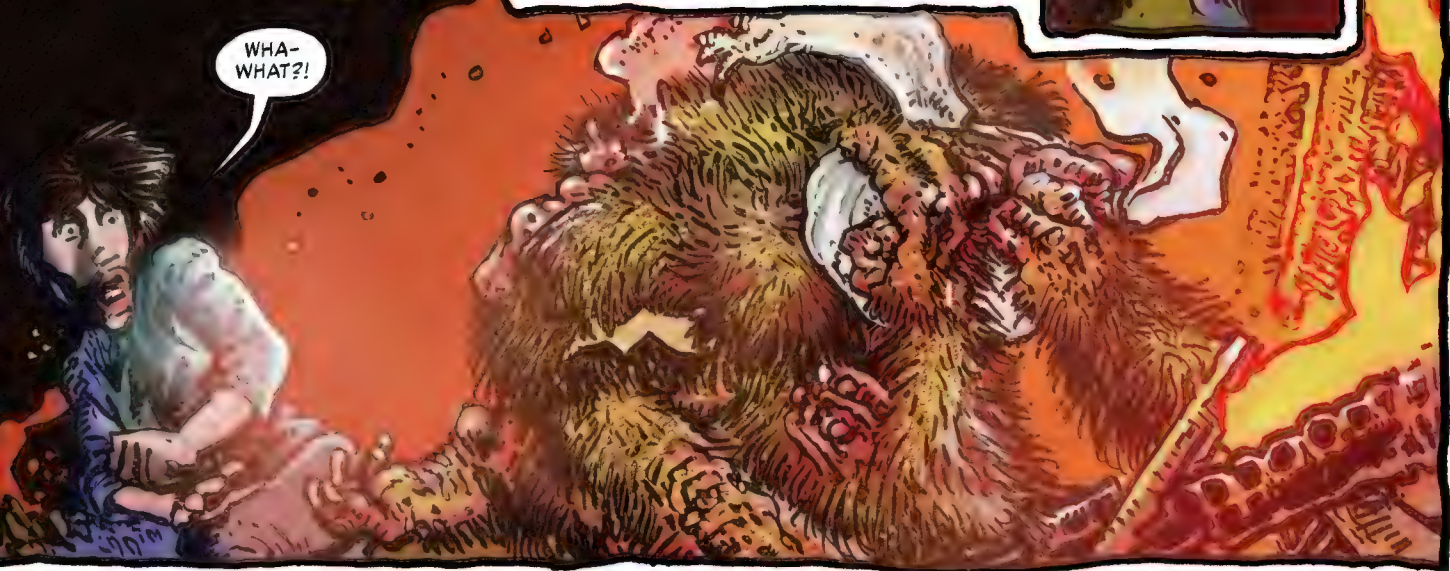
GNAGH-HA-HA! IT'S
JUST YOU AND ME, NOW,
XERA. I'M SURE YOU'LL
BE DELICIOUS.



NO! NO!
HELP!
PLEASE!



WHA-
WHAT?!







THERE
THEY ARE!

XERA!
KAREN! MY
DEARS!

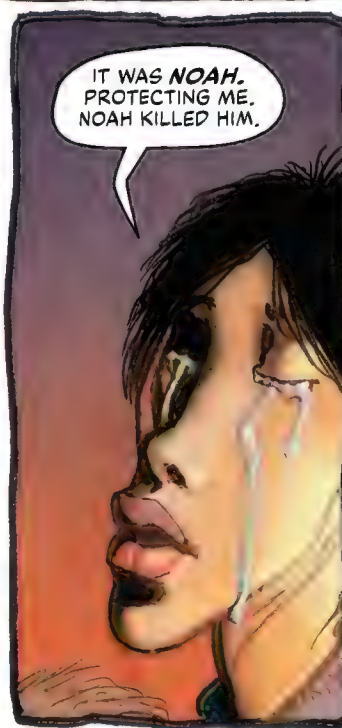
WE'RE
OKAY. IT'S
OVER.



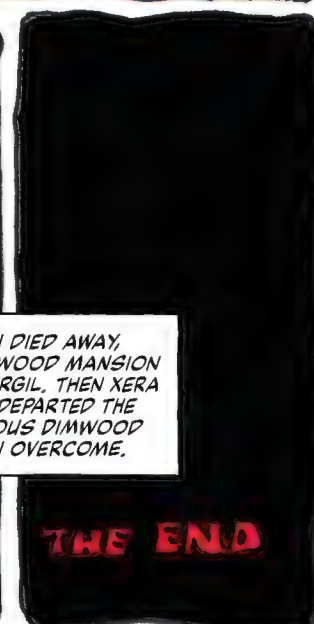
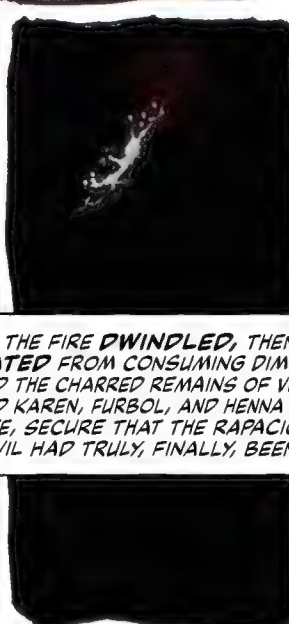
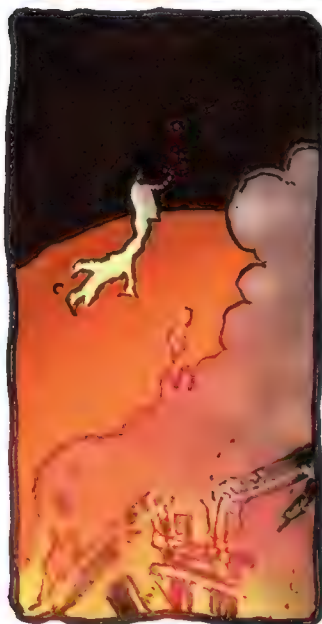
VIRGIL
WAS STILL
ALIVE? YOU
HAD TO KILL
HIM?



I DIDN'T.



IT WAS **NOAH**.
PROTECTING ME.
NOAH KILLED HIM.



AS THE FIRE **DWINDLED**, THEN DIED AWAY,
SATED FROM CONSUMING DIMWOOD MANSION
AND THE CHARRED REMAINS OF VIRGIL, THEN XERA
AND KAREN, FURBOL, AND HENNA DEPARTED THE
SITE, SECURE THAT THE RAPACIOUS DIMWOOD
DEVIL HAD TRULY, FINALLY, BEEN OVERCOME.

THE END

COLORING CORBEN

JOSÉ VILLARRUBIA

In 2001 I wrote my first article about Corben, which, like this one, I titled “Coloring Corben.” It was done for the deluxe oversized reprint that Marvel Comics published of my first collaboration with the master: *Cage*. The story had been first presented as a five-issue miniseries for their Max imprint, and it was written by Brian Azzarello. As a fan of Corben’s work since I was a teenager, I had been practically begging Marvel’s then editor in chief, Axel Alonso, to let me color whatever comics Corben would do. The first one turned out to be *Startling Stories: Banner*, but I was not chosen for it. Instead, Edgar Delgado and his Studio F were selected. The following year, Corben drew *Cage*. Axel decided to assign the ongoing *Incredible Hulk* series to Studio F and finally give me the opportunity to color Corben. For this, I will always be thankful to Axel.

I vividly remember opening a package I received containing the original line art for the first few pages. Corben’s masterful rendering and shading in stippling blew me away; the pages had a life of their own. After scanning them, I began coloring in a style I specifically developed for the art, digitally painting it with color transitions rendered in small dots and adding textures to reflect the story’s dingy environment. Axel loved it. Corben, however, not quite. He wrote me a very polite but clear email requesting something different, even providing a sample image for me to follow. I was very flattered by his guidance. But when I saw the test panels, I was very surprised. I had always associated his work with three-dimensional rendering and saturated color, but he had asked me for the opposite: pastel colors applied flatly and some smooth gradients. It was totally different from what I had seen him do before, but of course I followed his directions. A few weeks later, I received a gift from him, a big package containing five gorgeous life figure

drawings, which I immediately framed and which still hang in my living room. He also sent a postcard of a painting by Andrew Wyeth to express his satisfaction with the adjusted colors. I couldn’t have been happier.

Over the years, I got to color other projects by him: *Ghost Rider*, *Starr the Slayer*, *Conan the Cimmerian*, *Men of War*, and several covers. Also, in 2012, with the full support of my friend and editor Philip Simon, I undertook the restoration of the stories in *Dark Horse’s Creepy Presents Richard Corben*. It was a huge task, and Corben was fully cooperative, sending me scans of as many original pages as he still had. In many cases, he thought the comics were unsalvageable due to either their original poor printing or the deterioration of the art. But he was very pleased with the results. Over the years, we continued to correspond, and I assisted him as much as possible when he asked for technical advice about coloring, mainly to help expedite the process. I even put him in contact with my friend and assistant at the time, Cassie Scheuer, who became his flatter in his later projects. I was always happy to chat with him about anything. Corben considered Dave Stewart and me not just colorists but artists, and I was delighted whenever we worked together. Each new project was an event.

Everyone who knew and admired Corben was shocked by his passing in 2020. He was as vital as ever, had never retired, and had so many more stories planned. And now that seemed like it was not meant to happen. However, he left us a posthumous gift: a major 120-page graphic novel he had nearly completed. He had written, penciled, inked, and colored (with the help of his daughter, Beth) almost all the pages. I was very moved when his widow, Dona, and Beth asked me to help finish it. They specifically asked me to add rendering and textures to the last

23 pages to match the rest, a task that was ironically the opposite of Corben's initial instructions on *Cage*. It was quite a challenge, but I do love a challenge. Beth had colored all the pages in the flat hues agreed upon with her father, and Corben had finished rendering the first 97 pages. It was left to me to complete the rest. I meticulously studied the work to match Corben's application of highlights, shadows, textures, lighting effects, and color holds. When I finished and delivered the pages, I held my breath. Dona and Beth were very pleased with the results, which meant the world to me. *Dimwood* was finally completed!

Now, it is being presented as part of the Dark Horse Richard Corben Library, where I have been involved in restoring and overseeing the artistic direction of the five volumes featuring his best-known character, Den. It has been

incredibly fulfilling to reintroduce these exciting sword-and-planet adventures to new readers. The books are now being translated into multiple languages, including my native Spanish, for numerous new editions, cementing internationally the legacy of this visionary creator.

Corben never stopped imagining adventure stories in fantasy or science fiction settings which featured heroes like Den, such as Denaeus and Tugat (*Murky World*). However, in the last two decades, much of his work focused on gothic horror. He produced two collections of new versions of Edgar Allan Poe's tales, *Haunt of Horror: Edgar Allan*

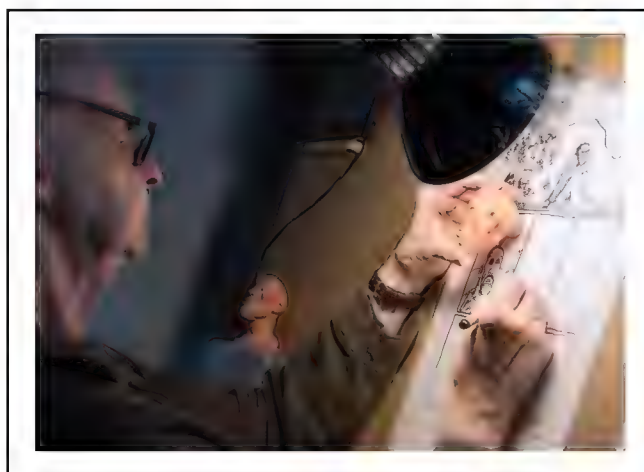
Poe and *Spirits of the Dead*. Additionally, he illustrated *Haunt of Horror: H. P. Lovecraft* and created an anthology of new short horror stories titled *Shadows on the Grave*. Corben also completed two graphic novels inspired by Lovecraft, *Ragemoor* and *Rat God*. Like these stories, *Dimwood* is set in a world haunted by malevolent supernatural beings. It stands as a remarkable capstone to Corben's later career, showcasing his continued mastery of the horror genre.

One of the last photographs I have seen of Corben, taken by Dona, shows him at his drawing table, holding a small sculpture of

the head of his character Xera Dim with his left hand and copying it on paper with his right hand. He was drawing page 120, the last one of *Dimwood*. This image is a lesson from which all artists can learn. His creativity never ran dry, and he

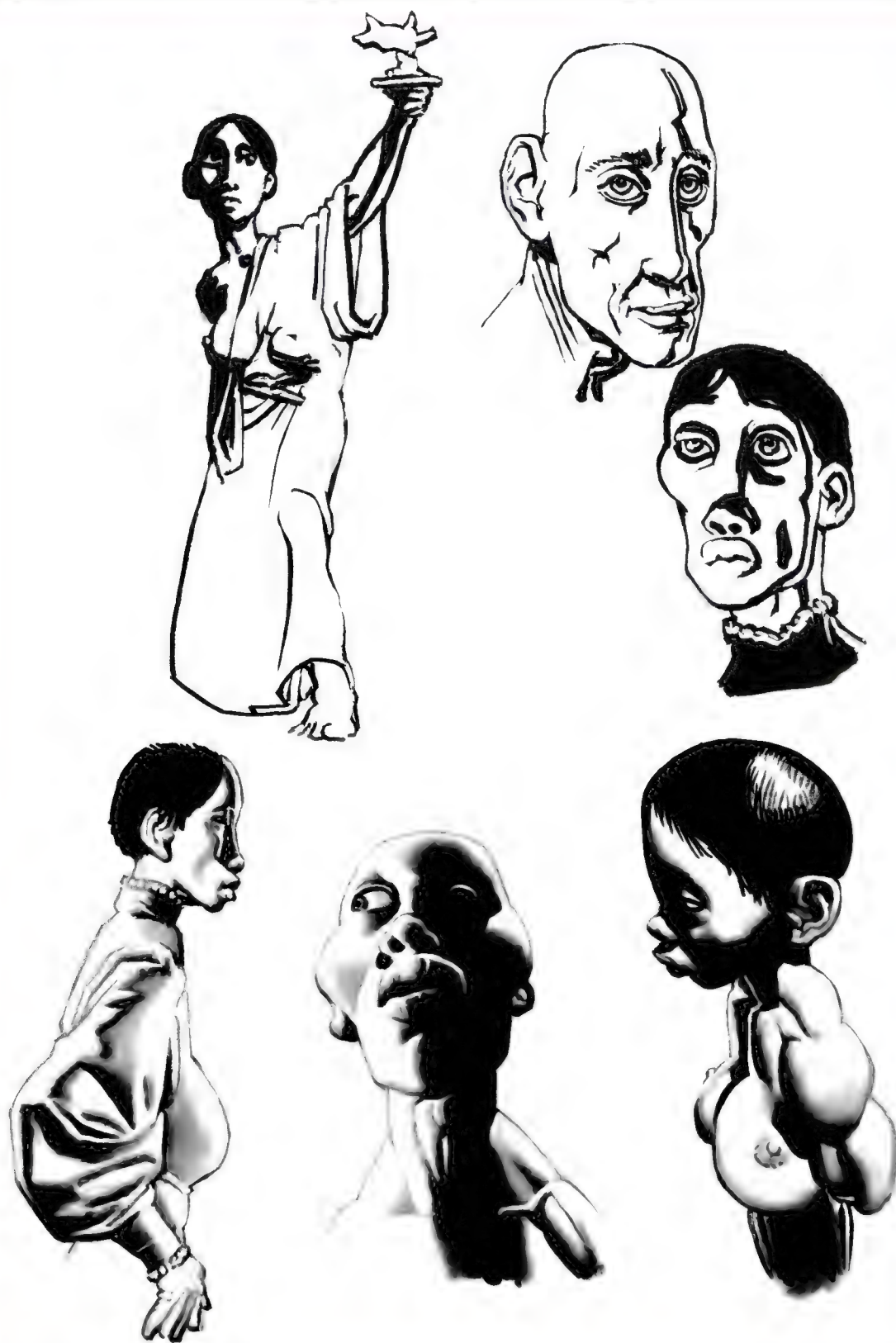
never cut any corners when making those ideas visible. He used his own handmade reference figures for even his more idiosyncratic and stylized characters. That level of passion for the work is palpable in each page of *Dimwood*, a testament to his meticulous attention to detail and commitment to his craft. It is a powerful reminder of the dedication required to bring the best of one's artistic vision to life. For me, it has been an absolute honor to be included as a small part of this, his last journey, and to witness firsthand the culmination of his lifelong devotion to the art of storytelling.

JOSÉ VILLARRUBIA
Madrid, July 15, 2024



DIMWOOD™ GALLERY











RICHARD CORBEN was born in Missouri and grew up in Sunflower, Kansas, a community that worked for the Sunflower Ordnance Works, an army plant that manufactured bombs in World War II.

Corben drew comics all of his life. An early effort was a series of comics about the adventures of TRAIL, the family dog. Later, he created imitations of Tarzan and Brothers of the Spear. He also showed a keen interest in animation by turning many pads of paper into animated flipbooks.

While attending the Kansas City Art Institute, he concentrated on basic drawing and painting, developing skills that would become vital in creating his chosen realistic style. At that time, his college offered no courses for animation, but by using his father's 8 mm movie camera, Corben nevertheless produced a 5-minute animated film highlighting the labors of Heracles as his senior project.

After graduation, Corben wanted to go to New York to launch a career in comics or animation, but he was shy and timid, and put off such a drastic move. After working in construction for his father for a while, he found a local job as an artist/ animator/cameraman in a Kansas City industrial film company. During this time, despite his shyness, he found a girl to marry him.

After nearly ten years at the film company, Corben felt frustrated that he really hadn't given his art career a chance. He started drawing so-called "underground" comix and fanzines at night after working a full-time job during the day. About this same time, Warren Publishing Company began a series of black-and-white horror comics, CREEPY, EERIE, and VAMPIRELLA. This was a perfect match for Corben's interests, and he drew several stories for CREEPY on speculation. Unfortunately, none of these were accepted. But the "wannabe" comic book artist

persisted and even met James Warren at a science fiction convention. Finally, Warren and his editor, Bill Dubay, relented and started sending Corben scripts to draw. At last, a foothold was established in his comic career. Even

with the responsibilities of a wife, a daughter and a mortgage, the young artist now felt confident enough to quit his full-time job at the industrial film company and devote all his time to drawing.

The underground comix surge spread to Europe, and requests to reprint Corben underground features began to appear. His fantasy character, DEN, was created for the American underground comic, GRIM WIT; DEN was next printed in the French METAL HURLANT, and then printed in the American HEAVY METAL. During this era, Richard and Dona started FANTAGOR PRESS, a publishing company featuring Richard's comics. Unfortunately, the business wasn't enough to support them. Next, Corben began drawing for American comics—D.C., MARVEL, DARK HORSE, and others.

Corben believed that maintaining drawing skills required constant practice. He regularly attended life drawing classes all throughout his career. He found the activity both an ongoing challenge and a source of pleasure.

His love and interest in animation continued throughout his lifetime and motivated him to create digitally animated movies he shared on his web site and Facebook page.

Richard was married for 56 years to Dona, and is the father of watercolor artist and comic book colorist, Beth. His life and love was devoted to his family and his art. He was a humble man and an extremely kind, good man.

Richard Corben died December 2, 2020.







“Dive into the belly of the beast. And be amazed.”
—JOE LANSDALE



Well known for his legendary fantasy underground masterpieces published by Fantagor Press as well as *Heavy Metal*, Richard Corben's work has been recognized internationally having been awarded one of the most prestigious recognitions in comics literature the Grand Prix at Angoulême as well having been inducted into the Will Eisner Award Hall of Fame.

In the densely vegetated forest of Dimwood, a young woman returns to her family home after many years' absence. Xera has gaping holes in her memories of her childhood and family, as obscured and dim as the surrounding forest. In Dimwood Mansion, with its decaying, labyrinthine levels she seeks the missing pieces of her past and makes connections with mysterious disappearances and gruesome murders in this original gothic tale, Corben's final graphic novel.

Dimwood is the next book in a series of deluxe graphic novels from renowned creator Richard Corben's library to be published by Dark Horse Comics. This special edition collects the never before published graphic novel *Dimwood*, created with color assistance from Corben's daughter Beth Corben Reed and finishing work on the last three chapters from long-time Corben collaborator José Villarrubia, allowing *Dimwood* to be published as a complete graphic novel. Comes with bonus material, letters by Nate Piekos of Blambot, and an introduction by Joe Lansdale, all presented in a gorgeous hardcover with a dust jacket.

